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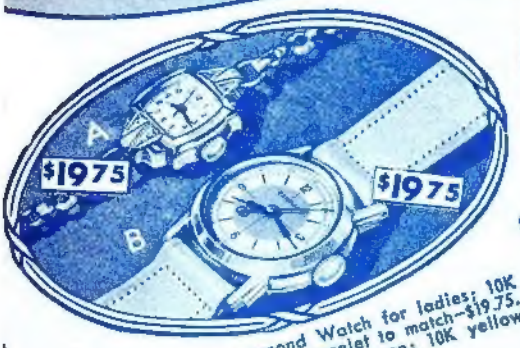

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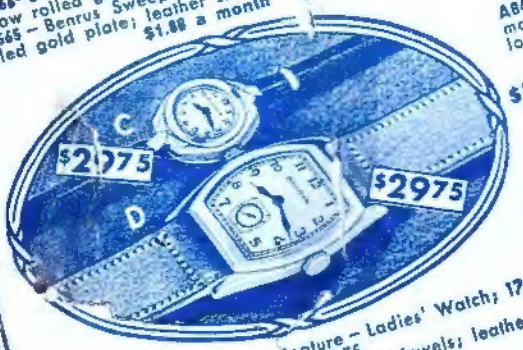

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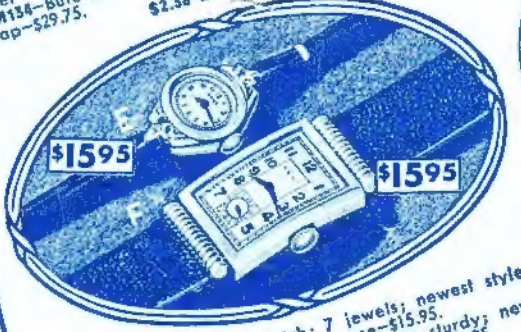

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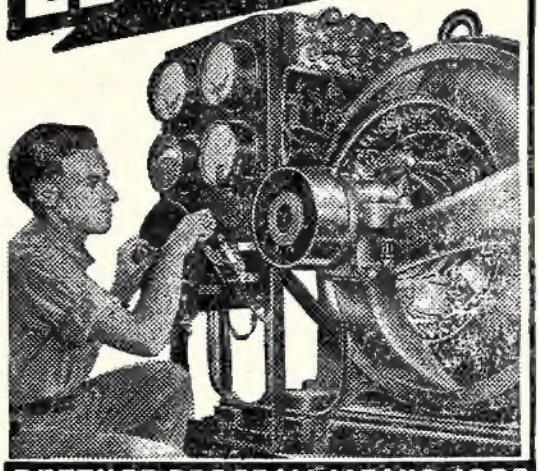

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Dragon Moon

A NOVELETTE OF LOST ATLANTIS

By HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "The Watcher at the Door," "Hydra," "Spawn of Dagon," etc.

Out of the dark—out of the unknown—came Karkora . . . rotting the souls of the kings of Cyrena. For Karkora, the Pallid One, was a creature more loathsome than anything on earth. It was beyond good or evil, a Presence from the Outside—a shadow of which the "altar fires had whispered."

"Through the room a cry rose and mounted, wordless, fearful."

1. *Elak of Atlantis*

Of great limbs gone to chaos,
A great face turned to night—
Why bend above a shapeless shroud
Seeking in such archaic cloud
Sight of strong lords and light?
—Chesterton.

THE wharf-side tavern was a bedlam. The great harbor of Poseidonia stretched darkly to the southeast, but the waterfront was a blaze of bright lanterns and torches. Ships had made port today, and this tavern, like the others, roared with mirth and rough nautical oaths. Cooking-smoke and odor of sesame filled the broad low room, mingled with the sharp tang of wine. The swarthy seamen of the south held high carnival tonight.

In a niche in the wall was an image of the patron god, Poseidon of the sunlit seas. It was noticeable that before swilling liquor, nearly every man spilled a drop or two on the floor in the direction of the carved god.

A fat little man sat in a corner and muttered under his breath. Lycon's small eyes examined the tavern with some distaste. His purse was, for a change, heavy with gold; so was that of Elak, his fellow adventurer. Yet Elak preferred to drink and wench in this brawling, smelly tavern,

a prediliction that filled Lycon with annoyance and bitterness. He spat, muttered under his breath, and turned to watch Elak.

The lean, wolf-faced adventurer was quarreling with a sea captain whose huge, great-muscled body dwarfed Elak's. Between the two a tavern wench was seated, her slanted eyes watching the men slyly, flattered by the attention given her.

The seaman, Drezzar, had made the mistake of underestimating Elak's potentialities. He had cast covetous eyes upon the wench and determined to have her, regardless of Elak's prior claim. Under other circumstances Elak might have left the slant-eyed girl to Drezzar, but the captain's words had been insulting. So Elak remained at the table, his gaze wary, and his rapier loosened in its scabbard.

He watched Drezzar, noting the sunburnt, massive face, the bushy dark beard, the crinkled scar that swept down from temple to jawbone, blinding the man in one gray eye. And Lycon, called for more wine. Steel would flash soon, he knew.

Yet the battle came without warning. A stool was overturned, there was a flare of harsh oaths, and Drezzar's sword came out, flaming in the lamplight. The wench screamed shrilly and fled, having little taste for bloodshed save from a distance.

Elak crouched catlike, his rapier motionless in his hand. A glint of angry laughter shone in the cold eyes.

Drezzar feinted; his sword swept out in a treacherously low cut that would have disemboweled Elak had it reached its mark. But the smaller man's body writhed aside in swift, flowing motion; the rapier shimmered. Its point gashed Drezzar's scalp.

They fought in silence. And this, more than anything else, gave Elak the measure of his opponent. Drezzar's face was quite emotionless. Only the scar stood out white and distinct. His blinded eye seemed not to handicap him in the slightest degree.

Lycon waited for a chance to sheathe his steel in Drezzar's back Elak would disapprove, he knew, but Lycon was a realist.

Elak's sandal slipped in a puddle of spilled liquor, and he threw himself aside desperately, striving to regain his balance. He failed. Drezzar's lashing sword drove the rapier from his hand, and Elak went down, his head cracking sharply on an overturned stool.

The seamen poised himself, sighted down his blade, and lunged. Lycon was darting forward, but he knew he could not reach the killer in time.

And then—from the open door came the inexplicable. Something like a streak of flaming light lashed through the air, and at first Lycon thought it was a thrown dagger. But it was not. It was—flame!

White flame, darting and unearthly! It gripped Drezzar's blade, coiled about it, ripped it from the seaman's hand. It blazed up in blinding fiery light, limning the room in starkly distinct detail. The sword fell uselessly to the floor, a blackened, twisted stump of melted metal.

Drezzar shouted an oath. He stared at the ruined weapon, and his bronzed face paled. Swiftly he whirled and fled through a side door.

The flame had vanished. In the door a man stood—a gross, ugly figure clad in the traditional brown robe of the Druids.

Lycon, skidding to a halt, lowered his sword and whispered, "Dalan!"

Elak got to his feet, rubbing his head ruefully. At sight of the Druid his face changed. Without a word he nodded to Lycon and moved toward the door.

The three went out into the night.

2. Dragon Throne.

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
And the Crown is ours to take—
With a naked sword at the Council board,
And under the throne the snake,
Now we are come to our Kingdom!

—Kipling.

"I bring you a throne," Dalan said, "but you must hold it with your blade."

They stood at the end of a jetty, looking out at the moonlit harbor waters. The clamor of Poseidonia seemed far away now.

Elak stared at the hills. Beyond them, leagues upon leagues to the north, lay a life he had put behind him. A life he had given up when he left Cyrena to gird on an adventurer's blade. In Elak's veins ran the blood of the kings of Cyrena, northernmost kingdom of Atlantis. And, but for a fatal quarrel with his stepfather, Norian, Elak would have been on the dragon throne even then. But Norian had died, and Elak's brother, Orander, took the crown.

Elak said, "Orander rules Cyrena. Do you ask me to join a rebellion against my brother?" An angry light showed in the adventurer's cold eyes.

"Orander is dead," the Druid said quietly. "Elak, I have a tale to tell you, a tale of sorcery and black evil that has cast its shadow over Cyrena. But first—" He fumbled in his shapeless brown robe and drew forth a tiny crystal sphere. He cupped it in his palm, breathed upon it. The clear surface clouded, misted—and the fog seemed to permeate the entire globe. The Druid held a ball of whirling gray cloud in his hand.

Within the sphere a picture grew, microscopic but vividly distinct. Elak peered closely. He saw a throne, and a man who sat upon it.

"South of Cyrena, beyond the mountains, lies Kiriath," Dalan said. "Sepher ruled it. And now Sepher still sits upon his throne, but he is no longer human."

In the globe the face of Sepher sprang out in startling clarity. Involuntarily Elak drew back, his lips thinning. At a casual glance Sepher seemed unchanged, a black-bearded, bronzed giant with the keen eyes of a hawk, but Elak knew that he looked upon a creature loathsome beyond anything on earth. It was not evil, as he knew it, but a thing beyond good and evil as it was beyond humanity or deity. A Presence from Outside had touched Sepher and taken Kiriath's king for its own. And Elak knew this was the most horrible being he had ever seen.

Dalan hid the crystal. He said coldly, "Out of the unknown has come a being named Karkora. What he is I know not. I have cast the runes, and they say little to me. The altar fires have whispered of a shadow that will come upon Cyrena, a shadow that may spread over all Atlantis. Karkora, the Pallid One, is not human, nor is he a demon. He is—alien, Elak."

"What of my brother?" the adventurer asked.

"You have seen Sepher," Dalan said. "He is possessed, a vessel of this entity called Karkora. Ere I left Orander, he, too, had—changed."

A muscle twitched in Elak's brown cheek. The Druid went on.

"Orander saw his doom. Day by day the power of Karkora over him increased, and the soul of your brother was driven further into the outer dark. He died—by his own hand."

Elak's face did not change expression. But for minutes he was silent, a deep sorrow in his gray eyes.

Lycon turned to look out across the sea.

The Druid went on, "Orander sent a message to you, Elak. You, in all Atlantis, are of the royal line of Cyrena. Yours, therefore, is the crown. It will not be easy to hold. Karkora is not defeated. But my magic will aid you."

Elak said, "You offer me the dragon throne?"

Dalan nodded.

"The years have changed me, Dalan. I have gone through Atlantis a vagabond and worse. I put my birthright behind me and forgot it. And I'm not the same man

who went from Cyrena years ago," Elak said softly, laughing a little bitterly, and looking over the jetty's edge at his face reflected in the dark swell of the water. "Only a king may sit on the dragon throne. For me—it would be a jest. And a sorry one."

"You fool!" the Druid whispered—and there was rage in the sibilant sound. "Blind, mad fool! Do you think the Druids would offer Cyrena to the wrong man? Blood of kings is in your veins, Elak. It is not yours to deny. You must obey."

"Must?" The word was spoken lightly, yet Lycon felt a tenseness go through him, tightening his muscles. "Must?" Elak asked.

"The decision is mine, Druid. By Mider! The throne of Cyrena means much to me. Therefore I shall not sit in it!"

Dalan's toad face was gargoylish in the moonlight. He thrust his bald, glistening head forward, and his thick, stubby fingers twisted.

"Now am I tempted to work magic on you, Elak," he said harshly. "I am no—"

"I have given you my answer."

The Druid hesitated. His somber eyes dwelt on Elak. Then, without a word, he turned and went lumbering off into the night. His footsteps died.

Elak remained staring out at the harbor. His cheeks were gray, his mouth a tortured white line. And he whirled, abruptly, and looked at the hills of Poseidonia.

But he did not see them. His gaze went beyond them, far and far, probing through all Atlantis to the kingdom of the north—Cyrena, and the dragon throne.

3. The Gates of Dream

Churel and ghoul and Djinn and sprite
Shall bear us company tonight,
For we have reached the Oldest Land
Wherein the powers of Darkness range.
—Kipling.

ELAK'S sleep that night was broken by dreams—flashing, disordered visions of many things. He stared up at the white moonlit ceiling of the apartment. And—it was changed. The familiar room was gone. Light still existed, but it was oddly changed—grayish and unreal. Unearthly planes and angles slipped past Elak, and in his ears a low humming grew. This changed to a high-pitched, droning whine, and died away at last.

The mad planes reassembled themselves. In his dream Elak saw a mighty crag upthrust against cold stars—colossal against a background of jagged mountain peaks. Snow dappled them, but the darkness of the crag was unbroken. On its top was a tower, dwarfed by distance.

A flood seemed to lift Elak and bear him swiftly forward. In the base of the crag, he saw, were great iron gates. And these parted and swung aside, yawning for him as he moved through.

They shut silently behind him.

And now Elak became conscious of a Presence. It was stygian black; yet in the tenebrous darkness there was a vague inchoate stirring, a sense of motion that was unmistakable.

Without warning Elak saw—the Pallid One!

A white and shining figure flashed into view. How tall it was, how close or distant, the man could not tell. Nor could he see more than the bare outline. A crawling, leprous shimmer of cold light rippled over the being; it seemed little more than a white shadow. But a shadow—three-dimensional, alive!

The unearthly terror of Karkora, the Pallid One!

The being seemed to grow larger. Elak knew he was watched, coldly and dispassionately. His senses were no longer dependable. It did not seem as though he beheld Karkora with his eyes alone—he was no longer conscious of his body.

He remembered Dalan, and Dalan's god. And he cried silently upon Mider for aid.

The shuddering loathing that filled him did not pass, but the horror that tore at his mind was no longer as strong. Again he cried to Mider, forcing himself to concentrate on the Druid god.

Once more Elak called out to Mider. And, silently, eerily, a wall of flame rose about him, shutting off the vision of Karkora. The warm, flickering fires of Mider were a protective barrier—earthly, friendly.

They closed in—drew him back. They warmed the chill horror that froze his mind. They changed to sunlight—and the sunlight was slanting in through the window, beside which Elak lay on his low bed, awake and shuddering with reaction.

"By the Nine Hells!" he cursed, leaping up swiftly. "By all the gods of Atlantis! Where's my rapier?" He found it, and whirled it hissing through the air. "How can a man battle dreams?"

He turned to Lycon, slumbering noisily nearby, and kicked the small man into wakefulness.

"Hog-swill," said Lycon, rubbing his eyes. "Bring another cup, and swiftly, or I'll—eh? What's wrong?"

ELAK was dressing hastily. "What's wrong? Something I didn't expect. How could I know from Dalan's words the sort of thing that's come to life in Atlantis?" He spat in disgust. "That leprous foulness shall never take the dragon throne!"

He slammed his rapier into its scabbard. "I'll find Dalan. I'll go back with him. To Cyrena."

Elak was silent, but deep in his eyes was a black horror and loathing. He had seen the Pallid One. And he knew that never in words could he hope to express the burning foulness of alien Karkora.

But Dalan had vanished. It was impossible to find the Druid in teeming Poseidonia. And at last Elak gave up hope and determined to take matters into his own hands. A galley called *Kraken* was leaving that day, he learned, and would beat up the western coast. In fact, by the time Elak had hired a boatman to take him and Lycon to the vessel, the galley's oars were already dipping into the swells.

Elak's cockleshell gained its side, and he clambered over the gunwale, hoisting Lycon after him. He tossed a coin to the boatman and saw the man depart.

THE sweating backs of slaves were moving rhythmically under the lash of the overseers. One of these came forward at a run, his bronzed face angry.

"Who are you?" he hailed. "What do you seek on the *Kraken?*"

"Take us to your captain," Elak said shortly. His hand touched the heavy purse at his belt, and coins jingled. The overseer was impressed.

"We're putting to sea," he said. "What do you want?"

"Passage to Cyrena," Lycon snapped. "Be—"

"Bring them here, Rasul," a gruff voice broke in. "They are friends. We'll give them passage to Cyrena—aye!"

And Drezzar, Elak's opponent in the tavern brawl, hastened along the poop toward them, teeth gleaming in his bushy beard.

"Ho!" he yelled at a nearby group of armed seamen. "Seize those two! Take them—alive!" "You dog," Drezzar said with cold rage. He stood before Elak and lifted his hand as though to strike the captive.

Elak said stoically, "I want passage to Cyrena. I'll pay well for it."

"So you will," Drezzar grinned, and ripped off Elak's purse. He opened it and ran golden coins through his thick fingers. "You'll work for it, too. But you'll not reach Cyrena."

"Two more oarsmen for you, Rasul. Two more slaves.

"See that they work!"

He turned and strode away. Unresisting, Elak was dragged to a vacant oar and chained there, Lycon shackled beside him. His hands fell in well-worn grooves on the polished wood.

Rasul's whip cracked. The overseer called, "Pull! Pull!"

The *Kraken* sped seaward. And, chained to his oar, straining at the unaccustomed toil, Elak's dark wolf-face bore a smile that was not pleasant to see.

4. The Ship Sails North

Orpheus has harped her,
Her prow has sheared the spray,
Fifty haughty heroes at her golden oarlocks sway,
White the wave before her flings,
Bright from shore she lifts and swings,
Wild he twangs the ringing strings—
Give way! Give way!

—Benet.

THEY drove down along the coast and skirted the southern tip of Atlantis. Then the galley crept northwest, up the long curve of the continent, and all the while the days were cloudless and fair, and the skies blue as the waters of the Ocean Sea.

Elak bided his time until the *Kraken* dropped anchor one afternoon at an uninhabited island, to replenish the water supply. Drezzar went ashore with a dozen others, leaving only a few men in charge of the ship. This was apparently safe enough, with the slaves chained. Moreover, Drezzar had the only keys. But, at sunset, Elak nudged Lycon awake and told him to keep watch.

"What for?" Lycon's voice was surly. "Do you—" He broke off, staring, as Elak took a tiny twisted bit of metal from his sandal and inserted it delicately in the lock of his ankle-cuff. "Gods!" Lycon cursed. "You had that all the time—and you waited till now!"

"These locks are easy to pick," Elak said. "What? Of course I waited! We've only a few enemies aboard now, instead of more than a dozen. Keep watch, I tell you."

Lycon obeyed. Footsteps creaked upon the deck occasionally, and there were lanterns here and there on the ship, but their illumination was faint enough. The lapping of water against the hull drowned the soft scrape and click as Elak worked. Presently he sighed in satisfaction and opened the cuff.

Metal clicked and scraped. Elak was free. He turned to Lycon—and then hurrying footsteps sounded on the raised deck. Rasul, the overseer, ran up, dragging his long whip. He peered down—and dragged out his sword, cursing. With the other hand he swept the whip in a great singing blow, smashing down on Elak's unprotected shoulders.

Lycon acted. In one swift motion he flung himself forward, guarding Elak; the lash ripped skin and flesh from Lycon's side. And then Elak's sinewy hand closed on the tough hide; he pulled mightily—pulled it from Rasul's grasp.

"Ho!" the overseer shouted. "Ho! To me!" His voice roared out over the dark sea. His long sword was a pale flickering light in the glow of the lanterns.

Two more men, armed, came running up behind Rasul. They spread out and closed in on Elak. He grinned unpleasantly, as a wolf smiles. The whip was coiled in his hand.

It sprang out suddenly, like a striking snake. The fanged, vicious tip hissed shrilly. In the dimness the lash was difficult to see, impossible to dodge. Rasul roared in pain.

"Slay him!" the overseer shouted.

The three ran in, and Elak gave way,

his wrist turning as he swung the whip. A thrown dagger brought blood from the Atlantean's shoulder. And a man staggered back, screaming shrilly, clawing at his eyes that were blinded by the tearing rip of the lash.

"Slay me, then," Elak whispered, cold laughter in his eyes. "But the dog's fangs are sharp, Rasul."

He caught a glimpse of Lycon, bent above his bonds, busily manipulating the bit of metal that would unlock them. Voices called from the shore. Rasul shouted a response, and then ducked and gasped as the whip shrieked through the dark air.

"'Ware my fangs, Rasul!" Elak smiled mirthlessly.

And now the two—Rasul and his companion—were in turn giving way. Step by step Elak forced them back, under the threat of the terrible lash. They could not guard against it, could not see it. Out of the gloom it would come striking, swift as a snake's thrust, leaping viciously at their eyes. The slaves were awake and straining in their chains, calling encouragement to Elak. The man who had been blinded made a misstep and fell among the rowers. They surged up over him; lean hands reached and clawed in the lantern-light. He screamed for a time, and then made no further sound.

Lycon's voice rose, shrill and peremptory, above the tumult.

"Row!" he yelped. "Row, slaves! Ere Drezzar returns—row for your freedom!" Alternately he cursed and threatened and cajoled them, and worked at his bonds with flying fingers.

Elak heard a whisper at his side, saw a slave thrusting a sword at him, hilt-first—the blade the blinded one had dropped. Gratefully he seized it, hurling the whip away. The feel of the cool, leather-bound hilt was grateful. Tide of strength surged up Elak's arm from the sharp steel.

It was not his rapier—but it would do.

"My fangs, Rasul," he said, laughing—and ran in. His two opponents spread out, but he had foreseen that move. He turned his back on Rasul, cut at the other, and almost in the same motion whirled and leaped past, dodging a thrust by a hair's-breadth. And now Rasul only faced him. The other man was down, tearing at a throat sliced through to the spine.

Lycon shouted, "Row, slaves! For your lives!"

The long oars clacked and moved in confusion; then habit stepped in, and rhythmically, slowly, the blades dug into the sea. Lycon yelled a chant, and the slaves kept time to it. Gradually the galley gained way.

On the deck swords flamed and clashed. But Elak was not fated to slay Rasul. The overseer stumbled, dropped to one knee—and hands reached for him out of the dark. Shouting, he was dragged down among the slaves. Voices rose to a yelping crescendo of hate. Rasul screamed—and was silent.

Lycon leaped up, free from his chains. He cursed the rowers; their momentary inattention to their duty had caused confusion. An oar, caught among others, splintered and broke. The butt bent like a bow, snapped back, and smashed a slave's face to bloody ruin. From overside came cries and commands.

THE face of Drezzar rose above the rail, hideous, contorted, the scar flaming red. He gripped his sword between his teeth. After him armed men came pouring.

Lycon, a captured blade bare in his hand, ran toward them, yelling objurgations at the slaves. The oars moved again, tore at the sea, sent the galley through the waves once more. A slave had long since cut the anchor-rope.

A dozen armed men, swords gleaming, were ringed about Lycon, who, his back

against the mast, was valiantly battling and cursing in lurid oaths. A few steps away Drezzar came catlike, and murder was in his eyes. He saw Elak stir, and ran in, blade ready.

Elak did not stoop to recover his sword. He sprang forward, under the sweep of the steel, which Drezzar had not expected. The two men went down together, rolling on the blood-slippery deck.

Drezzar tried to reverse the sword in his hand and stab Elak in the back. But Elak's supple body writhed aside, and simultaneously his lean, sinewy fingers closed on Drezzar's, above the hilt of the blade.

Drezzar tried to turn the blow, but could not. Elak continued his enemy's thrust. And the sword went smoothly into Drezzar's belly, without pausing till it grated against the backbone.

"My fangs, Drezzar," Elak said very softly, and with no expression on his wolf-face—and then drove the sword further in till it pinned the captain, like a beetle, to the deck. Drezzar's mouth opened; a roaring exhalation of breath, fraught with ghastly agony, seemed torn out of the man. His hands beat the deck; his body doubled up and arched like a bow.

He coughed blood, gnashed his teeth till they splintered and cracked—and so died.

Elak sprang up. He saw a heavy iron key hanging at Drezzar's belt. This he tore away and cast down among the slaves. A grateful clamor came in response.

Lycon called frantically for aid. Elak responded. But now the outcome of the battle was a foregone conclusion. One by one the freed slaves passed the iron key to their neighbors and came springing up to add their numbers to Elak's cause. And, presently, the last of the ship's masters lay dead on deck, and the oarsmen—no longer in chains, no longer slaves—sent the galley plunging through the dark sea to the north.

5. Aynger of Amenalk

For the man dwelt in a lost land
Of boulders and broken men . . .
—Chesterton.

THEY came to a forbidding, bleak coast that loomed high above the galley. The cold winds of Autumn filled the sails and let the weary oarsmen rest. The sea turned smoothly gray, surging in long, foamless swells under a blue-gray sky. The sun gave little heat. The crew turned gratefully to the ship's stock—oil and wine and woven stuff, finding warmth and comfort in it.

But Elak was chafed by inaction. He longed to reach Cyrena; endlessly he paced the decks, fingering his rapier and pondering on the mystery of the thing called Karkora. What was this Pallid One? Whence had it come? These problems were insoluble, and remained so till, one night, Elak dreamed.

He dreamed of Dalan. The Druid priest seemed to be standing in a forest glade; before him a fire flickered redly. And Dalan said:

"Leave your ship at the red delta. Seek Aynger of Amenalk. Tell him you seek the throne of Cyrena!"

There was no more. Elak awoke, listening to the creaking of the galley's timbers and the whisper of waves against the side. It was nearly dawn. He rose, went on deck, and searched the horizon under a shielding palm.

To the right, breaking the gray cliffs, was a gap. Beyond it—an island. And on the island a castle loomed, part of the rock, it seemed, growing from it.

The galley swept on. And now Elak saw that a river ran between the broken cliffs. At its mouth was a delta, made of reddish sand.

So, in the cold, lowering dawn, Elak and Lycon left the galley. Willing oarsmen rowed them to shore. The two climbed

the northern cliff and stood staring around. Inland the plateau stretched unbroken by tree or bush, windswept and desolate. To the west lay the Ocean Sea, chill and forbidding.

"Perhaps this Aynger of your dream dwells in that castle," Lycon said, pointing and shivering. "One of the men told me this is Kiriath. To the north, beyond the mountains, lies Cyrena."

Elak said somberly, "I know. And Sepher rules over Kiriath—Sepher, whom Karkora has taken for his own. Well—come on."

They set out along the edge of the cliff. The wind blew coldly, and brought to them a thin, high piping that seemed to come out of nowhere. Sad, mournful, weird, it murmured half-heard in the air about the two.

And across the plateau a man came—a great gray man, roughly clad, with unkempt hair and iron-gray beard. He played upon a set of pipes, but put these away as he saw Elak and Lycon. He came closer and halted, with folded arms, waiting.

The man's face might have been chipped from the rough rocks of this land. It was harsh and strong and forbidding, and the cool gray eyes were like the sea.

"What do you seek here?" he asked. His voice was deep and not at all unpleasant.

Elak hesitated. "Aynger. Aynger of Amenalk. Do you know of him?"

"I AM Aynger."

For a heartbeat there was silence. Then Elak said, "I seek the throne of Cyrena."

Laughter sprang into the gray eyes. Aynger of Amenalk reached out a huge hand and gripped Elak's arm, squeezing it painfully. He said, "Dalan sent you! Dalan!"

Elak nodded.

"But it is not me you seek. It is Mayana—the daughter of Poseidon. You must seek her there." He pointed to the distant castle on the island. "Her power alone can aid you. But first—come."

He led the way to the cliff's edge. A perilous, narrow path led down the jagged face; Aynger started along it with sure-footed ease, and Elak and Lycon followed more gingerly. Far below, the breakers tore upon the rocks; sea-birds called shrilly.

The path ended at a cave-mouth. Aynger entered, beckoning to the others. The cavern widened into a high-arched chamber, obviously Aynger's home. He gestured to a heap of furs, and gave each of his guests a great horn of mead.

"So. Dalan sent you. I had wondered. Orander is dead. Once the Pallid One has set his seal on a man, there is escape in death alone." . . .

"Karkora," Elak said musingly. "What is he? Do you know, Aynger?"

"You must seek your answer from Mayana, on the isle. Only she knows. Mayana—of the seas. Let me tell you." The gray eyes grew bright with dream. A softness crept into the deep voice. "This land, on the western shore, is Amenalk. Not Kiriath. Once, long ago, Amenalk stretched far to the east. We were a great people then. But invaders came conquering, and now only this bit of land is left to us. Yet it is Amenalk. And I dwell here because in my veins runs the blood of kings."

Aynger flung back his gray, tousled head. "And for ages the castle on the isle had existed. None dwelt there. There were legends that even before the Amenalks held this land, an ancient sea-people made it their home. Sorcerers they were, warlocks and magicians. But they died and were forgotten. So, in time, my own people were scattered through Kiriath, and I dwelt here alone.

"Sepher ruled, well and wisely. One night he walked alone on the cliffs of Amenalk, and when he returned to his

palace, he brought a bride with him. The bride was Mayana. Some say he found her in the island castle. Some say she rose from the waves. I think she is not human. She is one of the old sea-race—

"A shadow fell on the land. Out of the dark, out of the unknown, came Karkora. He took Sepher for his own. Mayana fled here, and dwells now in the castle, protected by her sorcery. And Karkora rules."

AYNGER'S gray beard jutted; his eyes were lambent pools. He said, "My people were a Druid race. We worshipped great Mider, as I do now. And I tell you that Karkora is a foulness and a horror—an evil that will spread through all the world if the Druids fail to destroy him. Mayana holds his secret. Mayana knows. You must go to her on her isle. For myself—" A mighty hand clenched. "I have king's blood, and my people live, though in bondage. I shall go through Kiriath and gather men. I think you will need armies, ere you sit on Cyrena's dragon throne. Well, I have an army for you, and for Mider."

Aynger reached behind him, brought out a huge war-hammer, bound with thongs. Laughter touched his grim face.

"We shall fight in the old way, woad-painted, without armor. And I think Helm-Breaker will taste blood again. If you get aid from Mayana—well. But with you or without you, man of Cyrena, Amenalk will go forth to battle!"

The great gray man towered against the cave-mouth, a grim, archaic figure, somehow strong with primeval menace. He stood aside, pointing.

"Your way lies there, to the isle. Mine lies inland. When we meet again, if we do, I shall have an army to give you."

Silently Elak moved past Aynger and went up the cliff path. Lycon trailed him. On the windy, treeless plateau he stood unmoving, while the gray giant passed him without a word and strode away, his war-hammer over one muscular shoulder, beard and hair flying in the wind.

Aynger grew small in the distance. Elak nodded to Lycon.

"I think we have a strong ally there. We'll need him. But now—this Mayana. If she can solve the riddle of Karkora, I'll find her though I have to swim."

"You won't have to," Lycon said, wiping his mouth. "Gods, that mead was good! There's a bridge to the isle—see? A narrow one, but it will serve. Unless she's set a dragon to guard it."

6. Mayana

By the tall obelisks, all seaweed-girt,
Drift the pale dead of long and long ago,
Lovers and kings who may not more be hurt,
Wounded by lips or by the dagger's blow.
—*The Sunken Towers.*

FROM the cliff's edge a narrow bridge of rock jutted, a natural formation worn by wind and rain. It ended on a jagged ledge, at the back of which a black hole gaped. Elak said, "Lycon, wait here. I must take this road alone."

The little man disagreed profanely. But Elak was firm.

"It will be safer. So we won't both fall into the same trap. If I'm not back by sundown, come after me—you may be of aid then." Lycon could not help but realize the truth of this. He shrugged fat shoulders.

"Very well. I'll wait in Aynger's cave. His mead was potent; I'm anxious to sample more. Luck, Elak."

Nodding, the Atlantean started along the bridge. He found it safer not to look down, but the surging roar of the breakers sounded disquietingly from beneath. Sea-birds mewed and called. The wind tore at his swaying body.

But at last he was across, and felt the

firm stability of the rocky ground under his sandals. Without a backward glance he entered the cave-mouth. Almost immediately outside sounds dimmed and quieted.

The road led down—a natural passage, seemingly, that turned and twisted in the rock. Sand was gritty underfoot, with bits of shell here and there. For a time it was dark, and then a greenish, vague luminous glow appeared, apparently emanated by the sand on which he trod.

It was utterly silent.

Still the tunnel led down, till Elak's feet felt moisture beneath him. He hesitated, staring around. The rocky walls were dewed and sweating. A dank, salty odor was strong in his nostrils. Loosening his rapier in its scabbard, he went on.

The green glow brightened. The passage turned; Elak rounded the corner, and stood motionless, staring. Before him a vast cavern opened.

It was huge and terrifyingly strange. Low-roofed, stalactites hung in myriad shapes and colors over the broad expanse of an underground lake. The green shining was everywhere. The weight of the island above seemed to press down suffocatingly, but the air, despite a salt sea-smell, was fresh enough.

At his feet a sandy half-moon of a beach reached down to the motionless surface of the water. Further out, he could see far down vague shadows that resembled sunken buildings — fallen peristyles and columns, and far away, in the center of the lake, was an island.

Ruined marble crowned it. Only in the center a small temple seemed unharmed; it rose from shattered ruins in cool, white perfection. All around it the dead and broken city lay, to the water's edge and beyond. A submerged, forgotten metropolis lay before Elak.

Silence, and the pale green expanse of the waveless lake.

Softly Elak called, "Mayana." There was no response.

Frowning, he considered the task before him. He felt an odd conviction that what he sought lay in the temple on the islet, but there was no way of reaching it save by swimming. And there was something ominous about the motionless green of the waters.

Shrugging, Elak waded out. Icy chill touched his legs, crept higher about his loins and waist. He struck out strongly. And at first there was no difficulty; he made good progress.

But the water was very cold. It was salt, and this buoyed him up somewhat; yet when he glanced at the islet it seemed no nearer. Grunting, Elak buried his face in the waters and kicked vigorously.

His eyes opened. He looked down. He saw, beneath him, the sunken city.

Strange it was, and weird beyond imagination, to be floating above the wavering outline of these marble ruins. Streets and buildings and fallen towers were below, scarcely veiled by the luminous waters, but possessing a vague, shadowy indistinctness that made them half-unreal. A green haze clothed the city. A city of shadows—

And the shadows moved and drifted in the tideless sea. Slowly, endlessly, they crept like a stain over the marble. They took shape before Elak's eyes.

Not sea-shapes—no. The shadows of men walked in the sunken metropolis. With queer, drifting motion the shadows went to and fro. They met and touched and parted again in strange similitude of life.

Stinging, choking cold filled Elak's mouth and nostrils. He spluttered and struck out, realizing that he was far beneath the surface, that, unconsciously holding his breath, he had drifted into the depths. He fought his way up.

It was oddly difficult. Soft, clinging

"I spent months in strange temples. His magic was not that of the sea, soft and kindly as the waves, but of a darker sort."

arms seemed to touch him; the water darkened. But his head broke the surface, and he drank deeply of the chill air. Only by swimming with all his strength could he keep from sinking. That inexplicable drag pulled him down.

He went under. His eyes were open, and he saw, far below, movement in the sunken city. The shadow-shapes were swirling up, rising, spinning like autumn leaves—rising to the surface. And shadows clustered about Elak, binding him with gossamer fetters. They clung feathery and tenacious as spider-webs.

The shadows drew him down into the shining depths.

He struck out frantically. His head broke water once more; he saw the islet, closer now.

"Mayana!" he called. *"Mayana!"*

RUSTLING movement shook the shadows. A ripple of mocking laughter seemed to go through them. They closed in again, dim, impalpable, unreal. Elak went under once more, too exhausted to fight, letting the shadows have their will with him. Only his mind cried out desperately to Mayana, striving to summon her to his aid.

The waters brightened. The green glow flamed emerald-bright. The shadows seemed to pause with odd hesitation, as though listening.

Then suddenly they closed in on Elak. They bore him through the waters; he was conscious of swift movement amid whirling green fire.

The shadows carried him to the islet, bore him up as on a wave, and left him upon the sands.

The green light faded to its former dimness. Choking, coughing, Elak clambered to his feet. He stared around.

The shadows had vanished. Only the motionless lake stretched into the distance. He stood amid the ruins of the islet.

Hastily he staggered away from the water's marge, clambering across broken plinths and fallen pillars, making his way to the central temple. It stood in a tiny plaza, unmarred by time, but stained and discolored in every stone.

The brazen door gaped open. Unsteadily Elak climbed the steps and paused at the threshold. He looked upon a bare room, lit with the familiar emerald glow, featureless save for a curtain, on the further wall, made of some metallic cloth and figured with the trident of the sea-god.

There was no sound but Elak's hastened breathing. Then, abruptly, a low splashing came from beyond the curtain. It parted.

Beyond it was green light, so brilliant it was impossible to look upon. Silhouetted against the brightness for a moment loomed a figure—a figure of unearthly slimness and height. Only for a second did Elak see it; then the curtain swung back into place and the visitant was gone.

Whispering through the temple came a voice, like the soft murmur of tiny, rippling waves. And it said:

"I am Mayana. Why do you seek me?"

7. Karkora

And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy . . . and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.

—Revelations 13:1.

ELAK'S wet hand crept to his rapier. There had been no menace in the whisper, but it was strangely—inhuman. And the silhouette he had seen was not that of any earthly woman.

Yet he answered quietly enough, no tremor in his voice:

"I seek the dragon throne of Cyrena. And I come to you for aid against Karkora."

There was silence. When the whisper came again, it had in it all the sadness of waves and wind.

"Must I aid you? Against Karkora?"

"You know what manner of being he is?" Elak questioned.

"Aye—I know that well." The metallic curtain shook. "Seat yourself. You are tired—how are you named?"

"Elak."

"Elak, then—listen. I will tell you of the coming of Karkora, and of Erykion the sorcerer. And of Sepher, whom I loved." There was a pause; then the low whisper resumed.

"Who I am, what I am, you need not know, but you should understand that I am not entirely human. My ancestors dwelt in this sunken city. And I—well, for ten years I took human shape and dwelt with Sepher as his wife. I loved him. And always I hoped to give him a son who would some day mount the throne. I hoped in vain, or so I thought.

"Now in the court dwelt Erykion, a wizard. His magic was not that of the sea, soft and kindly as the waves, but of a darker sort. Erykion delved in ruined temples and pored over forgotten manuscripts of strange lore. His vision went back even before the sea-folk sprang from the loins of Poseidon, and he opened the forbidden gates of Space and Time. He offered to give me a child, and I listened to him, to my sorrow.

"I shall not tell you of the months I spent in strange temples, before dreadful altars. I shall not tell you of Erykion's magic. I bore a son—dead."

The silver curtain shook; it was long before the unseen speaker resumed. "And this son was frightful. He was deformed in ways I cannot let myself remember. Sorcery had made him inhuman. Yet he was my son, my husband's son, and I loved him. When Erykion offered to give him life, I agreed to the price he demanded—even though the price was the child himself."

"'I shall not harm him,' Erykion told me. 'Nay, I shall give him powers beyond those of any god or man. Some day he shall rule this world and others. Only give him to me, Mayana.' And I hearkened.

"Now of Erykion's sorcery I know little. Something had entered into the body of my son while I bore him, and what this thing was I do not know. It was dead, and it awoke. Erykion awoke it. He took this blind, dumb, maimed man-child and bore it to his home in the depths of the mountains. With his magic he deprived it of any vestige of the five senses. Only life remained, and the unknown dweller within.

"I remembered something Erykion had once told me. 'We have in us a sixth sense, primeval and submerged, which can be very powerful once it is brought to light. I know how to do that. A blind man's hearing may become acute; his power goes to the senses remaining. If a child, at birth, be deprived of all five senses, his power will go to this sixth sense. My magic can insure that.' So Erykion made of my man-child a being blind and dumb and without consciousness, almost; for years he worked his spells and opened the gates of Time and Space, letting alien powers flood through. This sixth sense within the child grew stronger. And the dweller in his mind waxed great, unbound by the earthly fetters that bind humans. This is my son—my man-child—Karkora, the Pallid One!"

AND silence. And again the whisper resumed.

"Yet it is not strange that I do not entirely hate and loathe Karkora. I know he is a burning horror and a thing that should not exist; yet I gave him birth. And so, when he entered the mind of Sepher, his father, I fled to this my castle. Here I dwell alone with my shadows. I strove to forget that once I knew the fields and skies and hearths of earth. Here, in my own place, I forgot.

"And you seek me to ask aid." There was anger in the soft murmur. "Aid to destroy that which came from my flesh!"

Elak said quietly, "Is Karkora's flesh—yours?"

"By Father Poseidon, no! I loved the human part of Karkora, and little of that is left now. The Pallid One is—is—he has a thousand frightful powers, through

his one strange sense. It has opened for him gateways that should remain always locked. He walks in other worlds, beyond unlit seas, across the nighted voids beyond earth. And I know he seeks to spread his dominion over all. Kiriath fell to him, and I think Cyrena. In time he will take all Atlantis, and more than that."

Elak asked, "This Erykion, the wizard—what of him?"

"I do not know," Mayana said. "Perhaps he dwells in his citadel yet, with Karkora. Not for years have I seen the sorcerer."

"Cannot Karkora be slain?"

There was a long pause. Then the whisper said, "I know not. His body, resting in the citadel, is mortal, but that which dwells within it is not. If you could reach the body of Karkora—even so you could not slay him."

"Nothing can kill the Pallid One?" Elak asked.

"Do not ask me this!" Mayana's voice said with angry urgency. "One thing, one talisman exists—and this I shall not and cannot give you."

"I am minded to force your talisman from you," Elak said slowly, "if I can. Yet I do not wish to do this thing."

FROM beyond the curtain came a sound that startled the man—a low, hopeless sobbing that had in it all the bleak sadness of the mournful sea. Mayana said brokenly:

"It is cold in my kingdom, Elak—cold and lonely. And I have no soul, only my life, while it lasts. My span is long, but when it ends there will be only darkness, for I am of the sea-folk. Elak, I have dwelt for a time on earth, and I would dwell there again, in green fields with the bright cornflowers and daisies gay amid the grass—with the fresh winds of earth caressing me. The hearth-fires, the sound of human voices, and a man's love — my Father Poseidon knows how I long for these again."

"The talisman," Elak said.

"Aye, the talisman. You may not have it."

Elak said very quietly, "What manner of world will this be if Karkora should rule?"

There was a shuddering, indrawn breath. Mayana said, "You are right. You shall have the talisman, if you should need it. It may be that you can defeat Karkora without it. I only pray that it may be so. Here is my word, then: in your hour of need, and not until then, I shall send you the talisman. And now go. Karkora has an earthly vessel in Sepher. Slay Sepher. Give me your blade, Elak."

Silently Elak unsheathed his rapier and extended it hilt-first. The curtain parted. Through it slipped a hand.

A hand—inhuman, strange! Very slender and pale it was, milk-white, with the barest suggestion of scales on the smooth, delicate texture of the skin. The fingers were slim and elongated, seemingly without joints, and filmy webs grew between them.

The hand took Elak's weapon and withdrew behind the curtain. Then it reappeared, again holding the rapier. Its blade glowed with a pale greenish radiance.

"Your steel will slay Sepher now. And it will give him peace." Elak gripped the hilt; the unearthly hand made a quick archaic gesture above the weapon.

"So I send a message to Sepher, my husband. And—Elak—kill him swiftly. A thrust through the eye into the brain will not hurt too much."

Then, suddenly, the hand thrust out and touched Elak upon the brow. He was conscious of a swift dizziness, a wild exaltation that surged through him in hot waves. Mayana whispered:

"You shall drink of my strength, Elak. Without it, you cannot hope to face Kar-

kora. Stay with me for a moon—drinking the sea-power and Poseidon's magic."

"A moon—"

"Time will not exist. You will sleep, and while you sleep strength will pour into you. And when you awake, you may go forth to battle—strong!"

The giddiness mounted; Elak felt his senses leaving him. He whispered, "Lycon—I must give him a message—"

"Speak to him, then, and he will hear. My sorcery will open his ears."

Dimly, as though from far away, Elak heard Lycon's startled voice.

"Who calls me? Is it you, Elak? Where —I see no one on this lonely cliff."

"Speak to him!" Mayana commanded. And Elak obeyed.

"I am safe, Lycon. Here I must stay for one moon, alone. You must not wait. I have a task for you."

There was the sound of a stifled oath. "What task?"

"Go north to Cyrena. Find Dalan, or, failing that, gather an army. Cyrena must be ready when Kiriath marches. Tell Dalan, if you find him, what I have done, and that I will be with him in one moon. Then let the Druid guide your steps. And —Ishtar guide you, Lycon."

Softly came the far voice: "And Mother Ishtar be your shield. I'll obey. Farewell."

Green darkness drifted across Elak's vision.

Dimly, through closing eyes, he vaguely saw the curtain before him swept aside, and a dark silhouette moving forward—a shape slim and tall beyond human stature, yet delicately feminine withal. Mayana made a summoning gesture—and the shadows flowed into the temple.

They swept down upon Elak, bringing him darkness and cool, soothing quiet. He rested and slept, and the enchanted strength of the sea-woman poured into the citadel of his soul.

8. The Dragon's Throne

Dust of the stars was under our feet, glitter of stars above—
Wrecks of our wrath dropped reeling down as we fought and we spurned and we strove.
Worlds upon worlds we tossed aside, and scattered them to and fro,
The night that we stormed Valhalla, a million years ago!

—Kipling.

THE moon waxed and waned, and at last Elak awoke, on the further shore, by the cavern mouth that led to the upper world. The underground mere lay silent at his feet, still bathed in the soft green glow. In the distance the islet was, and he could make out the white outline of the temple upon it. The temple where he had slept for a month. But there was no sign of life. No shadows stirred in the depths beneath him. Yet within himself he sensed a secret well of power that had not been there before.

Pondering, he retraced his steps through the winding passage, across the rock bridge to the high ramp of the plateau. The plain was deserted. The sun was westering, and a cold wind blew bleakly from the sea.

Elak shrugged. His gaze turned north, and his hand touched the rapier-hilt.

"First, a horse," he grunted. "And then —Sepher! A blade for the king's throat!"

So within two hours a mercenary soldier lay dead, his blood staining a leathern tunic, and Elak galloped north on a stolen steed. Hard and fast he rode, through Kiriath, and whispers were borne to his ears on the gusting winds. Sepher was no longer in his city, they said. At the head of a vast army he was sweeping north to the Gateway, the mountain pass that led to Cyrena. From the very borders of Kiriath warriors were coming in answer to the king's summons; mercenaries and

adventurers flooded in to serve under Sepher. He paid well and promised rich plunder—the sack of Cyrena.

A trail of blood marked Elak's path. Two horses he rode to death. But at last the Gateway lay behind him; he had thundered through Sharn Forest and forded Monra River. Against the horizon towered a battlemented castle, and this was Elak's goal. Here Orander had ruled. Here was the dragon throne, the heart of Cyrena.

Elak rode across the drawbridge and into the courtyard. He cast his mount's reins to a gaping servitor, leaped from the horse, and raced across the yard. He knew each step of the way. In this castle he had been born.

And now the throne room, vast, high-ceilinged, warm with afternoon sunlight. Men were gathered there. Princes and lords of Cyrena. Barons, dukes, minor chieftains. By the throne—Dalan. And beside him, Lycon, round face set in unaccustomed harsh lines, for once sober and steady on his feet.

"By Mider!" Lycon roared. "Elak! *Elak!*"

The Atlantean pushed his way through the murmuring, undecided crowd. He came to stand beside the throne. His hand gripped Lycon's shoulder and squeezed painfully. The little man grinned.

"Ishtar be praised," Lycon murmured. "Now I can get drunk again."

Dalan said, "I watched you in the crystal, Elak. But I could not aid. The magic of the Pallid One battled my own. Yet I think you have other magic now—sea-sorcery." He turned to the mob. His lifted arms quieted them.

"This is your king," Dalan said.

Voices were raised, some in approbation, some in angry protest and objection. A tall, lean oldster shouted, "Aye—this is Zeulas, returned once more. This is Orander's brother."

"Be silent, Hira," another snapped. "This scarecrow Cyrena's king?"

Elak flushed and took a half-step forward. Dalan's voice halted him.

"You disbelieve, Gorlias?" he asked. "Well—d'you know of a worthier man? Will you sit on the dragon throne?"

Gorlias looked at the Druid with an oddly frightened air; he fell silent and turned away. The others broke into a renewed chorus of quarreling.

Hira silenced them. His lean face was triumphant. "There's one sure test. Let him take it."

He turned to Elak. "The lords of Cyrena have fought like a pack of snarling dogs since Orander's death. Each wanted the throne. Baron Kond yelled louder than the rest. Dalan offered him the dragon throne, in the name of Mider, if he could hold it."

FROM the others a low whisper went up—uneasy, fearful. Hira continued: "Kond mounted the dais a month ago and sat on the throne. And he died! The fires of Mider slew him."

"Aye," Gorlias whispered. "Let this Elak sit upon the throne!"

A chorus of assent rose. Lycon looked worried.

He murmured, "It's true, Elak. I saw it. Red fire came out of nowhere and burned Kond to a cinder."

Dalan was silent, his ugly face impassive. Elak, watching the Druid, could not read a message in the shallow black eyes.

Gorlias said, "If you can sit on the throne, I'll follow you. If not—you'll be dead. Well?"

Elak did not speak. He turned and mounted the dais. For a moment he paused before the great throne of Cyrena, his gaze dwelling on the golden dragon that writhed across its back, the golden dragons on the arms. For ages the kings of Cyrena

had ruled from this seat, ruled with honor and chivalry under the dragon. And now Elak remembered how, in Poseidonia, he had felt himself unworthy to mount the throne.

Would the fires of Mider slay him if he took his dead brother's place?

Silently Elak prayed to his god. "If I'm unworthy," he told Mider, with no thought of irreverence, but as one warrior to another, "then slay me, rather than let the throne be dishonored. Yours is the judgment."

He took his place on the dragon throne.

Silence fell like a pall on the great room. The faces of the crowd were intent and strained. Lycon's breath came fast. The Druid's hands, hidden under the brown robe, made a quick, furtive gesture; his lips moved without sound.

RED light flashed out above the throne. Through the room a cry rose and mounted, wordless, fearful. The fires of Mider flamed up in glaring brilliance and cloaked Elak!

They hid him in a twisting crimson pall. They swirled about him, blazing with hot radiance.

They swept into a strange, fantastic shape—a coiling silhouette that grew steadily more distinct.

A dragon of flame coiled itself about Elak!

And suddenly it was gone. Lycon was gasping oaths. The others were milling about in a confused mob. Dalan stood motionless, smiling slightly.

And on the dragon throne Elak sat unharmed! No breath of fire had scorched or blistered him; no heat had reddened his skin. His eyes were blazing; he sprang up and unsheathed his rapier. Silently he lifted it.

There was a clash of ringing blades. A forest of bright steel lifted. A great shout bellowed out.

The lords of Cyrena swore allegiance to their king!

Now, however, Elak found that his task had scarcely begun. The armies of Sepher were not yet in Cyrena; the king of Kiriath was waiting beyond the mountain barrier till he had gathered his full strength. But he would march soon, and Cyrena must by then be organized to resist him.

"Karkora didn't invade Kiriath," Elak said to Dalan one day as they rode through Sharn Forest. "He invaded the mind of the king instead. Why does he depend on armies to conquer Cyrena?"

Dalan's shapeless brown robe flapped against his horse's flanks. "Have you forgotten Orander? He tried there, and failed. Then there was no single ruler here. If he'd stolen the mind of Kond or Gorlias he'd still have had the other nobles against him. And conquer Cyrena he must, for it's the stronghold of Mider and the Druids. Karkora knows he must destroy us before he can rule this world and others, as he intends. So he uses Sepher and Kiriath's army. Already he's given orders to slaughter each Druid."

"What of Aynger?" Elak demanded.

"A message came from him today. He has gathered his Amenalks in the mountains beyond the Gateway. They wait for our word. Barbarians, Elak—but good allies. They fight like mad wolves."

Cyrena rose to arms. From steading and farm, castle and citadel, city and fortress, the iron men came streaming. The roads glittered with bright steel and rang to the clash of horses' hoofs. The dragon banners fluttered in the chill winds of winter.

Rise and arm! In the name of Mider and the Dragon, draw your blade! So the messengers called; so the word went forth. Rise against Kiriath and Sepher!

The defending swords of Cyrena flashed bright. They thirsted for blood.

And Sepher of Kiriath rode north against the Dragon.

9. The Hammer of Aynger

And a strange music went with him,
Loud and yet strangely far;
The wild pipes of the western land,
Too keen for the ear to understand,
Sang high and deathly on each hand
When the dead man went to war.
—Chesterton.

THE first snows of winter lay white on the Gateway. All around towered the tall, frosted peaks of the mountain barrier, and a bitter wind gusted strongly through the pass. Within a month deep snow and avalanches would make the Gateway almost impassable.

The sky was cloudless, of chill pale blue. In the thin air everything stood out in startling clarity; voices carried far, as did the crunching of snow underfoot and the crackle of rocks deep-bitten by the iron cold.

The pass was seven miles long, and narrow in only a few spots. For the most part it was a broad valley bounded by the craggy cliffs. Canyons opened into it.

Dawn had flamed and spread in the east. The sun hung above a snow-capped peak. South of a narrow portion of the Gateway part of Cyrena's army waited Behind them were reinforcements. Upon the crags were archers and arbalesters, waiting to rain death upon the invaders. Steel-silver moved against a background of white snow and black grim rocks.

Elak was astride a war-horse upon a small hillock. Hira rode up, gaunt old face keenly alert, joy of battle in the faded eyes. He saluted swiftly.

"The bowmen are placed and ready," he said. "We've got rocks and boulders into position to crush Sepher's army, should it get too far."

Elak nodded. He wore chain-armor, gold encrusted, with a close-fitting helm of gleaming steel. His wolf face was taut with excitement, and he curbed the steed as it curvetted.

"Good, Hira. You are in command there. I trust your judgment."

As Hira departed Dalan and Lycon arrived, the latter flushed and unsteady in his saddle. He gripped a drinking-horn and swilled mead from it occasionally. His long sword slapped the horse's flank.

"The minstrels will make a song of this battle," he observed. "Even the gods will eye it with some interest."

"Don't blaspheme," Dalan said, and turned to Elak. "I've a message from Aynger. His savage Amenalks wait in that side canyon—" The Druid flung out a pointing hand—"and will come when we need them."

"Aye," Lycon broke in, "I saw them. Madmen and demons! They've painted themselves blue as the sky and are armed with scythes and flails and hammers, among other things. And they're playing tunes on their pipes and bragging, each louder than the other. Only Aynger sits silent, fondling his Helm-Breaker. He looks like an image chipped out of gray stone."

At the memory Lycon shivered and then gulped the rest of the mead. "Faith," he said sadly, "the horn's empty. Well, I must get more." And off he went, reeling in the saddle.

"Drunken little dog," Elak remarked. "But his hand will be steady enough on the sword."

Far away a trumpet shouted shrilly, resounding among the peaks. Now the foreguard of Sepher's army was visible as a glitter of steel on casques and lifted spearheads. Along the pass they came, steadily, inexorably, in close battle formation. The trumpet sang and skirled.

In response drums of Cyrena snarled

answer. They rose to a throbbing, menacing roar. Cymbals clashed resoundingly. The banners of the dragon flung out stiffly in the cold blast.

Kiriath rode without a standard. In silence, save for the clashing of metallic hoofs and the angry screaming of the trumpet, they came, a vast array that flooded into the valley. Pikeman, archers, knights, mercenaries—on they came, intent on conquest and plunder. Elak could not see Sepher, though his gaze searched for the king.

And slowly the invaders increased their speed, almost imperceptibly at first, and then more swiftly till through the Gateway Kiriath charged and thundered, lances lowered, swords flashing. The trumpet shouted urgent menace.

Dalan's gross body moved uneasily in his saddle. He unsheathed his long blade.

Elak looked around. Behind him the army waited. Everything was ready.

The king of Cyrena rose in his stirrups. He lifted his rapier and gestured with it. He shouted:

"Charge! Ho—the Dragon!"

WITH a roar Cyrena swept forward down the pass. Closer and closer the two vast forces came. The drums roared death. From the icy peaks the clamor resounded thunderously.

A cloud of arrows flew. Men fell, screaming. Then, with a crash that seemed to shake the mountainous walls of the Gateway, the armies met.

It was like a thunderclap. All sanity and coherence vanished in a maelstrom of red and silver-steel, a whirlpool, an avalanche of thrusting spears, speeding arrows, slashing blades. Elak was instantly surrounded by foes. His rapier flew swift as a striking snake; blood stained its length. His horse shrieked and fell hamstrung to the ground. Elak leaped free and saw Lycon charging to the rescue. The little man was wielding a sword almost as long as himself, but his pudgy fingers handled it with surprising ease. He lopped off one man's head, ruined another's face with a well-placed kick of his steel-shod foot, and then Elak had leaped astride a riderless steed.

Again he plunged into the fray. The brown bald head of Dalan was rising and falling some distance away; the Druid roared like a beast as his sword whirled and flew and bit deep. Blood soaked the brown robe. Dalan's horse seemed like a creature possessed; it screamed shrilly, blowing through red, inflamed nostrils, snapped viciously and reared and struck with knife-edged hoofs. Druid and charger raged like a burning pestilence amid the battle; sweat and blood mingled on Dalan's toad face.

Elak caught sight of Sepher. The ruler of Kiriath bronzed, bearded giant towered above his men, fighting in deadly silence. Smiling wolfishly, Elak drove toward the king.

From the distance came the thin high wailing of pipes. Out of the side canyon men came pouring—barbarous men, half naked, their lean bodies smeared blue with woad. The men of Aynger! At their head ran Aynger himself, his gray beard flying, brandishing the hammer Helm-Breaker. The gray giant leaped upon a rock, gesturing toward the forces of Kiriath.

"Slay the oppressors!" he bellowed. "Slay! Slay!"

The weird pipes of the Amenalks shrilled their answer. The blue-painted men swept forward—

From the ranks of Sepher an arrow flew. It sped toward Aynger. It pierced his bare throat and drove deep—deep!

The Amenalk leader bellowed; his huge body arced like a bow. Blood spouted from his mouth.

A battalion charged out from the ranks

of Kiriath. They sped toward the Amenalks, lances lowered, pennons flying.

Aynger fell! Dead, he toppled from the rock into the lifted arms of his men. The pipes skirled. The Amenalks, bearing their leader, turned and fled back into the valley!

Cursing, Elak dodged a shrewd thrust, killed his assailant, and spurred toward Sepher. The hilt of his rapier was slippery with blood. His body, under the chain armor, was a mass of agonizing bruises; blood gushed from more than one wound. His breath rasped in his throat. The stench of sweat and gore choked him; he drove over ground carpeted with the writhing bodies of men and horses.

Down the valley Dalan fought and bellowed his rage. The battle-thunder crashed on the towering crags and sent deafening echoes through the Gateway.

Still the trumpets of Kiriath called; still the drums and cymbals of Cyrena shouted their defiance.

And still Sepher slew, coldly, remorselessly, his bronzed face expressionless.

Kiriath gathered itself and charged. The forces of Cyrena were forced back, fighting desperately each step of the way. Back to the narrowing of the pass they were driven.

High above the archers loosed death on Kiriath.

With ever-increasing speed Sepher's army thrust forward. A gust of panic touched the ranks of Cyrena. A dragon banner was captured and slashed into flying shreds by keen blades.

Vainly Elak strove to rally his men. Vainly the Druid bellowed threats.

The retreat became a rout. Into the narrow defile the army fled, jammed into a struggling, fighting mob. An orderly retreat might have saved the day, for Kiriath could have been trapped in the narrow pass and crippled by boulders thrust down by the men stationed above. As it was, Cyrena was helpless, waiting to be slaughtered.

Kiriath charged.

QUITE suddenly Elak heard a voice. In through the mountains. Above the call of trumpets came the thin wailing of pipes. Louder it grew, and louder.

From the side canyon the blue barbarians of Amenalk rushed in disorderly array. In their van a group ran together with lifted shields. Upon the shields was the body of Aynger!

Weirdly, eerily, the ear-piercing skirling of the pipes of Amenalk shrilled out. The woad-painted savages, mad with blood-frenzy, raced after the corpse of their ruler.

Dead Aynger led his men to war!

The Amenalks fell on the rear of the invaders. Flails and scythes and blades swung and glittered, and were lifted dripping red. A giant sprang upon the shield-platform, astride the body of Aynger. In his hand he brandished a war-hammer.

"Helm-Breaker!" he shouted. "He—Helm-Breaker!"

He leaped down; the great hammer rose and fell and slaughtered. Casques and helms shattered under the smashing blows; the Amenalk wielded Helm-Breaker in a circle of scarlet death about him.

"Helm-Breaker! Ho—slay! Slay!"

Kiriath swayed in confusion under the onslaught. In that breathing-space Elak and Dalan rallied their army. Cursing, yelling, brandishing steel, they whipped order out of chaos. Elak snatched a dragon banner from the dust, lifted it high.

He turned his horse's head down the valley. One hand lifting the standard, one gripping his bared rapier, he drove his spurs deep.

"Ho, the Dragon!" he shouted. *"Cyrena! Cyrena!"*

Down upon Kiriath he thundered. Behind him rode Lycon and the Druid. And

after them the remnants of an army poured. Hira led his archers from the cliffs. The arbalasters came bounding like mountain goats, snatching up swords and spears, pouring afoot after their king.

"Cyrena!"

The drums and cymbals roared out again. Through the tumult pierced the thin, weird calling of the pipes.

"Helm-Breaker! Slay! Slay!"

And then madness—a hell of shouting, scarlet battle through which Elak charged, Dalan and Lycon beside him, riding straight for the bushy beard that marked Sepher. On and on, over screaming horses and dying men, through a whirlpool of flashing, thirsty steel, thrusting, stabbing, hacking—

The face of Sepher rose up before Elak.

The bronzed face of Kiriath's king was impassive; in his cold eyes dwelt something inhuman. Involuntarily an icy shudder racked Elak. As he paused momentarily the brand of Sepher whirled up and fell shattering in a great blow.

Elak did not try to escape. He poised his rapier, flung himself forward in his stirrups, sent the sharp blade thrusting out.

The enchanted steel plunged into Sepher's throat. Simultaneously Elak felt his back go numb under the sword-cut; his armor tore raggedly. The blade dug deep into the body of the war-horse.

The light went out of Sepher's eyes. He remained for a heart-beat upright in his saddle. Then his face changed.

It darkened with swift corruption. It blackened and rotted before Elak's eyes. Death, so long held at bay, sprang like a crouching beast.

A foul and loathsome thing fell forward and tumbled from the saddle. It dropped to the bloody ground and lay motionless. Black ichor oozed out from the chinks of the armor; the face that stared up blindly at the sky was a frightful thing.

And without warning darkness and utter silence dropped down and shrouded Elak.

10. The Black Vision

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

—Revelations 20:10.

HE FELT again the dizzy vertigo that presaged the coming of Karkora. A high-pitched, droning whine rang shrilly in his ears; he felt a sense of swift movement. A picture came.

Once more he saw the giant crag that towered amid the mountains. The dark tower lifted from its summit. Elak was drawn forward; iron gates opened in the base of the pinnacle. They closed as he passed through.

The high whining had ceased. It was cimmerian dark. But in the gloom a Presence moved and stirred and was conscious of Elak.

The Pallid One sprang into view.

He felt a sense of whirling disorientation; his thoughts grew inchoate and confused. They were slipping away, spinning into the empty dark. In their place something crept and grew; a weird mental invasion took place. Power of Karkora surged through Elak's brain, forcing back the man's consciousness and soul, thrusting them out and back into the void. A dreamlike sense of unreality oppressed Elak.

Silently he called upon Dalan.

Dimly a golden flame flickered up, far away. Elak heard the Druid's voice whispering faintly, out of the abyss.

"Mider—aid him, Mider—"

Fires of Mider vanished. Elak felt again

the sense of swift movement. He was lifted—

The darkness was gone. Gray light bathed him. He was, seemingly, in the tower on the summit of the crag—the citadel of Karkora. But the place was unearthly!

The planes and angles of the room in which Elak stood were warped and twisted insanely. Laws of matter and geometry seemed to have gone mad. Crawling curves swept obscenely in strange motion; there was no sense of perspective. The gray light was alive. It crept and shimmered. And the white shadow of Karkora blazed forth with chill and dreadful radiance.

Elak remembered the words of Mayana, the sea-witch, as she spoke of her monstrous son Karkora.

"He walks in other worlds, beyond unlit seas, across the nighted voids beyond earth."

Through the whirling chaos a face swam, inhuman, mad, and terrible. A man's face, indefinably bestialized and degraded, with a sparse white beard and glaring eyes. Again Elak recalled Mayana's mention of Erykion, the wizard who had created the Pallid One.

"Perhaps he dwells in his citadel yet, with Karkora. Not for years have I seen the sorcerer."

If this were Erykion, then he had fallen victim to his own creation. The warlock was insane. Froth dribbled on the straggling beard; the mind and soul had been drained from him.

He was swept back and vanished in the grinding maelstrom of the frightful lawless geometrical chaos. Elak's eyes ached as he stared, unable to stir a muscle. The shadow of the Pallid One gleamed whitely before him.

The planes and angles changed; pits and abysses opened before Elak. He looked through strange gateways. He saw other worlds, and with his flesh shrinking in cold horror he stared into the depths of the Nine Hells. Frightful life swayed into motion before his eyes. Things of inhuman shape rose up out of nighted depths. A charnel wind choked him.

The sense of mental assault grew stronger; Elak felt his mind slipping away under the dread impact of alien power. Unmoving, deadly, Karkora watched—

"Mider," Elak prayed. "Mider—aid me!"

The mad planes swept about faster, in a frantic saraband of evil. The dark vision swept out, opening wider vistas before Elak. He saw unimaginable and blasphemous things, Dwellers in the outer dark, horrors beyond earth-life—

The white shadow of Karkora grew larger. The crawling radiance shimmered leprously. Elak's senses grew dulled; his body turned to ice. Nothing existed but the now gigantic silhouette of Karkora; the Pallid One reached icy fingers into Elak's brain.

The assault mounted like a rushing tide. There was no aid anywhere. There was only evil, and madness, and black, loathsome horror.

QUITE suddenly Elak heard a voice. In it was the murmur of rippling waters. He knew Mayana spoke to him by strange magic.

"In your hour of need I bring you the talisman against my son Karkora."

The voice died; the thunder of the seas roared in Elak's ears. A green veil blotted out the mad, shifting planes and angles. In the emerald mists shadows floated—the shadows of Mayana.

They swept down upon him. Something was thrust into his hand—something warm and wet and slippery.

He lifted it, staring. He gripped a heart, bloody, throbbing—alive!

The heart of Mayana! The heart be-

neath which Karkora had slumbered in the womb! The talisman against Karkora!

A shrill droning rose suddenly to a skirling shriek of madness, tearing at Elak's ears, knifing through his brain. The bleeding heart in Elak's hand drew him forward. He took a slow step, another.

About him the gray light pulsed and waned; the white shadow of Karkora grew gigantic. The mad planes danced swiftly.

And then Elak was looking down at a pit on the edge of which he stood. Only in the depths of the deep hollow was the instability of the surrounding matter lacking. And below was a shapeless and flesh-colored hulk that lay inert ten feet down.

It was man-sized and naked. But it was not human. The pulpy arms had grown to the sides; the legs had grown together. Not since birth had the thing moved by itself. It was blind, and had no mouth. Its head was a malformed grotesquerie of sheer horror.

Fat, deformed, utterly frightful, the body of Karkora rested in the pit.

The heart of Mayana seemed to tear itself from Elak's hand. Like a plummet it dropped, and fell upon the breast of the horror below.

A shuddering, wormlike motion shook Karkora. The monstrous body writhed and jerked.

From the bleeding heart blood crept out like a stain. It spread over the deformed horror. In a moment Karkora was no longer flesh-colored, but red as the molten sunset.

And, abruptly, there was nothing in the pit but a slowly widening pool of scarlet. The Pallid One had vanished.

Simultaneously the ground shook beneath Elak; he felt himself swept back. For a second he seemed to view the crag and tower from a distance, against the background of snow-tipped peaks.

The pinnacle swayed; the crag rocked. They crashed down in thunderous ruin.

Only a glimpse did Elak get; then the dark curtain blotted out his consciousness. He saw, dimly, a pale oval. It grew more distinct. And it was the face of Lycon bending above Elak, holding a brimming cup to the latter's lips.

"Drink!" he urged. "Drink deep!"

Elak obeyed, and then thrust the liquor away. He stood up weakly.

HE WAS in the pass of the Gateway. Around him the men of Cyrena rested, with here and there a blue-painted warrior of Amenalk. Corpses littered the ground. Vultures were already circling against the blue.

Dalan was a few paces away, his shallow black eyes regarding Elak intently. He said, "Only one thing could have saved you in Karkora's stronghold. One thing—"

Elak said grimly, "It was given me. Karkora is slain."

A cruel smile touched the Druid's lipless mouth. He whispered, "So may all enemies of Mider die."

Lycon broke in, "We've conquered, Elak. The army of Kiriath fled when you killed Sepher. And, gods, I'm thirsty!" He rescued the cup and drained it.

Elak did not answer. His wolf face was dark; in his eyes deep sorrow dwelt. He did not see the triumphant banners of the dragon tossing in the wind, nor did he envision the throne of Cyrena that waited. He was remembering a low, rippling voice that spoke with longing of the fields and hearth-fires of earth, a slim, inhuman hand that had reached through a curtain—a sea-witch who had died to save a world to which she had never belonged.

The shadow was lifted from Atlantis; over Cyrena the golden dragon ruled under great Mider. But in a sunken city of marble beauty the shadows of Mayana would mourn for Poseidon's daughter.

"And then the mammoth took the two of them in the circle of his trunk and threw them into space."

The Goddess of Zion

By DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

Was she real—or was she a mere painted dream from long ago?

IT WAS my first trip to the Zion National Park and as I slowly drove through it, pausing now and then to obtain a better view of the multicolored cliffs I was impressed with its grandeur and majesty. The canyon was rather wide when I drove into it but rapidly narrowed until finally the high walls were so close together that they barely left space for the road and the rushing mountain stream, which ran through it like a miniature Colorado River. The rock walls were all colors and where the sun hit them, sparkled like gigantic jewels.

The last week in August found few tourists in this waste place of great beauty. Now and then an automobile would pass, but for minutes at a time I had a sense of loneliness and isolation from the world. I found myself regretting that my dog was

not with me; she would not have appreciated the scenery, but, at least, she would have relieved my loneliness. At last I came to the end of the road. There was nothing to do but to turn around and go back, or leave the car and walk a few miles further up the trail. The shadows were now deep, almost twilight at the bottom of the canyon though it was only midafternoon. As I stopped the car and left it by the side of the road I looked to the left and saw the great white throne. A huge mountain with almost smooth sides, rearing its terrific mass upward some thousands of feet to end against a background of blue sky. A mountain of peculiar whiteness, bare of trees or any form of vegetation. And at the very top a circular opening so perfect in shape that it seemed to have been bored there by a gigantic auger.

I made a statement, "What a place to build a temple to worship a God!" and I asked myself a question, "What is on the other side of that hole? Has anyone ever been through it to find out?"

Before I had time to even think of the answer, a car parked in back of mine and the driver walked over and joined me. He was a young man, large, yellow hair and blue eyes. Even before he spoke I mentally classified him as someone like a Greek God. Not Jove or Vulcan but rather Apollo or Mercury.

"Rather fine," he commented, as he looked at the white mountain.

"More than fine," I replied. "It has a mysterious way of asking me questions I cannot, at least so far, find answers to."

"You wonder at it?"

"I do. For example, what is on the other side of that circular hole? Has anyone been back of it to find out? Was it made by water, wind or some long-forgotten race?"

"I judge," he commented, "that this is your first visit to Zion. You have never been up to the top?"

"Never, and it is my first visit. Have you been there?"

"Yes,—at least I think I have, but it was a long time ago—a very long time ago. Would you like to climb it?"

"Not this afternoon," I replied, looking at my watch. "I have no desire to spend the night halfway up. But I might consider the trip tomorrow."

"You really will go with me tomorrow?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes. If you think we can reach the top, and find out something more about that opening, I will accept your invitation. How long ago were you there?"

"I will tell you tomorrow. Suppose we have supper and a night's rest, and then meet here at dawn. We will see a lot of each other tomorrow, so it would be just as well to see little of each other today. I think it will be light soon after four in the morning, and we can leave our cars right here. Better bring some food with you, chocolate and sandwiches, or whatever you want. It will be a long walk."

"Dangerous?"

"Not especially. Slippery in spots, and you'd better wear rubber-soled shoes, but no need of ropes. If you have done any mountain climbing at all you will have no difficulty. Of course it has been some years since I was there, and there may have been changes in the path. If you find it too much for you, I will go on by myself. In fact I have to. I promised to be there."

THERE was no suitable reply to make to that statement. I did not want to be too inquisitive; so I told him I would meet him, and started my car. That night I spent at the small Lodge in the Canyon. After supper I looked up all the available literature, especially historical facts, but found nothing except that the canyon had been discovered by the Mormons, and had only recently been made a National Park

and accessible to tourists through the building of a road.

Before going to bed I asked the desk clerk whether anyone had ever been to the top of the white mountain.

"Not that I know of," he said laughingly. "I do not know why anyone would want to go there for except to brag about having been there. Of course I do not know what there is on the back side, but as far as I can see a man would have to be a human fly to climb it."

I DRESSED, had breakfast, bought some food and was in my car by three-thirty the next morning. At the end of the four-mile drive I saw the tail lights of another car. There was a little light but not much. The man was standing by his car, evidently waiting for me. We exchanged greetings, and he expressed his pleasure and slight astonishment that I had kept the appointment.

"Hardly expected you. Before we do anything else suppose we become acquainted. My name is Lief Larson and lately I have been living in Wyoming."

"And I am John Erickson, from Boston," I replied.

"Educated?"

"You might call it that, if a few degrees mean education."

"Not at all sensitive to the occult?"

"Hardly, though I do not know what you mean; that is, I do not know just how you use the word," I replied.

"Just now it does not make any difference. Not very light, but I guess you can see if you follow me."

"You know the trail?"

"I ought to."

For three hours I followed him along a winding and slightly upward narrow path. He walked rapidly, with the ease and grace of a deer or a mountain lion. Often he had to wait for me. At nine he sat down and I was glad to rest. We were surrounded by sharp sides of what seemed to be a secondary canyon. The walls were high and the rock black and vermilion. He pulled out of his pocket a large piece of chalk.

"Better mark the path from now on. You may be coming back by yourself."

"I am lost already," I remarked with an uneasy laugh.

"No. From here on back just take the easiest way downhill and it will take you back to the road. But as we go ahead just make a cross mark or an arrow every fifty feet on the rocks."

Without any further conversation he started, and now we entered a crack in the rock that was just wide enough for one person, and the walls were white.

"Once you are in here," Larson explained, "there are only two ways to go; forward or backward. The path widens considerably later on, but there are no side trails till we reach the top of the great white throne. It has been some time since I was here last, but it has not changed any. There are some wall pictures around the next turn."

He was right. On the white rock, painted in startling blacks, reds and yellows the pictures rose twenty feet above the bottom of the path. Some day they will be found and copied and a book written about them. All I can say now is that there were at least three hundred figures, life size, rather artistically done, and with the colors hardly faded. Men, women and animals. The men and women were fighting, working, loving and apparently worshiping. The animals? I recognized the mammoth with downward-curving tusks, the buffalo, deer and perhaps the beavers. Others seemed to go back hundreds of thousands of years, perhaps millions of years. There were figures, such as the cross, the swastika and the crescent moon. The men and women were brown and red, but high above all other pictures on the wall was a white

woman with golden hair. She had been painted against a background of black, and in one hand she held a writhing snake and in the other an ear of corn.

I had been walking slowly, but when I saw with sharply twisted neck this white woman's picture, I paused and sat down. My companion joined me.

"This is a most remarkable group of wall paintings," I exclaimed. "Do not pretend to be an expert in such matters but know enough about it to realize that these are as fine as anything in America. What I cannot understand is that no one has ever found them before. There should be a trail up here with satisfactory signs, and everyone who comes to Zion should come here."

"I am afraid that such publicity would spoil it. Can you imagine a stand here for food and drink? With postal cards, and booklets telling all about it? I am afraid that She would not like it."

"You mean that the lovely woman high on the wall would not approve? After all it is just a painted woman."

"I am not so sure about that. Are you? Do you suppose that she was just a dream placed on the rocks by those primitive artists? Or did they have such a woman in their lives?"

THERE did not seem to be any answer. Perhaps he did not want his questions answered. At least not at that time. We walked on and now came to steps carved out of the rock, and the steps were worn, either with water or the feet of men long dead. At times we went through long tunnels. Larson had brought a flashlight. He pointed it upwards and showed me the blackened ceiling.

"They used torches in those days," he explained.

I could tell by my ears that we were going up rather rapidly, and at last we came out through a short tunnel into brilliant daylight. We were on top of a mountain. I looked around. On all sides were great depths. And on one side was a circular hole. Without a word I climbed into it and looked down. Below was the cement road. I could even see our two automobiles, like little beetles, by that road, and going up and down were other little car-bugs. All around us were other mountains. But we were above them.

"I told you," cried Larson, in quite exhaltation, "that I would bring you to the top and show you the circular opening, and there it is. From the bottom of the canyon it looks rather small, but up here you see it is rather large and the base of it is level with the floor of the mesa. I think that it was originally carved out by water, but as we see it now it shows smoothing by human tools. See that large circular stone in back of it? That is the Queen's throne. During the ceremony of sacrifice she sits on it. There is sacrifice of men and women but no blood up here, because the offerings to the Goddess are hurled down into the canyon by a mammoth. They must have landed in the river. It was much larger in those days and their dead bodies were washed out of the canyon and finally eaten by the crows."

I looked at him. He was saying it all rather casually. In fact his matter-of-fact tone roused some resentment in me. I said:

"You seem to know a lot about it. Putting it on rather thick, are you not? Must think I am a tenderfoot, willing to believe anything you say."

"No. I presume you think I am a liar or insane or had a bad dream last night. Suppose we sit down and have something to eat, and while we are eating I am going to tell you a story. But first I want to give you the keys to my car. Tomorrow night there is going to be a full moon. At exactly twelve you stand just where the cars are parked. In my car you will find, in the glove compartment, a rather fine set

of binoculars. You keep looking at the circle. The moon will help you and then I think there will be fires back of the circle that will help you to see a little of what is happening. You can report the affair to the Park Police, call it an accident. No use notifying my family, because I have no one who cares. We will sleep up here tonight, and early tomorrow I want you to start for the bottom as fast as you can."

I was sure now that there was something wrong with his mind. Of course you cannot tell a man bluntly that he is insane, but I thought it might be best to humor him and try to take him down to civilization. Evidently, for some reason or other, he was thinking of killing himself by jumping through the hole. Must have had it all arranged for and even wanted someone to witness his curving leap through the air.

"Suppose we eat, and then go back together," I suggested.

"No. A promise is a promise. Listen to the story. I came out here the first time about seven hundred years ago, one of a party of Norsemen. I do not know what urge kept us going, but we followed the setting sun, west and still further west. I have a map in my car with our course marked on it as well as I can remember. We came to Niagara Falls and then followed the Great Lakes to the end of Lake Superior, and then west and south from there. Not in one year, you understand, because there were no automobiles then and no horses. We traveled in spring and summer, and in the fall we built huts and gathered firewood and provisions for the winter.

"We kept time by the number of winters. None of us could write; we were warriors and not scholars. Hardships? Plenty of them. Fighting? Plenty of that also. At times we were treated as Gods and at other times hunted like wild beasts. One by one my comrades died. At last I was left alone by the Great Salt Lake. I remember swimming in it. From there I went South and at last came to this Canyon. It was summer and the hunting was good. The river was nearly three times as large as it is now. I saw for the first time this white mountain with the circular opening, and that night I was captured by the brown people."

"Not Indians?" I asked.

"No. At least not like any Indians I have ever seen since. They were little people, none over five feet tall and a peculiar brown, not copper-colored and not black. Had it been daylight I might have escaped but they overpowered me before I was awake. I have to laugh when I think of it. Lief the Fearless, hero of a hundred sea battles, a man who never knew defeat, helpless and the captive of a group of little men I could have brushed aside like so many flies had I met them in the daylight.

"They did not want to hurt me. In fact they gave me food, and tried by signs to show that they wished to be friendly to me. But they had my armor and my sword, and their lances were long and sharp even though the spearheads were of stone. It seemed that all they wanted me to do was to go with them. There was nothing else I could do, so I went.

"They were cave people. I never was able to find just where they lived, because they covered my eyes. Not many of them. Perhaps not more than a hundred, counting the women and children. A dying race! At one time there must have been thousands of them because their bone heaps were large. And now I come to the part that will be hard for you to believe. They had a mammoth up here, a very old and large elephant and every day they brought him grass and grain up this path we have just taken. You saw a picture of one of them on the rocks. Remember? With the tusks turned downward?"

"NOW listen to me," I interrupted, "I do not want to be discourteous to you. I am willing to believe all the rest of your story but I draw the line at that elephant. I am willing to admit that there were such animals here at one time but not on top of this mountain. Not if he walked up the way we did. There were places where the space between the rock walls was so narrow he could not have possibly squeezed through."

"I thought you would say something like that. I had the same idea when I saw him for the first time. I said to myself, 'He is up here, but how did he get here?' I found out after I learned to talk to the Queen. They caught him when he was just a baby, took him up to the top and kept him there. Made a pet of him, taught him tricks; and when he grew full size he just stayed there because he could not get down."

"So they made a pet of the elephant?" I asked.

"Yes. Almost considered him as a God. And every year when they had their sacrifices he took a leading part. He would stand near the edge of this circle, and they would bring an offering to him and he would curl his trunk around the man and raise him in the air and then throw him over into the canyon."

"You saw him do that?"

"Yes. For five years. The brown people would go hunting and bring back Indian captives. They would wash them and feed them and take the best of care of them and then once a year they would all gather up here, light their fires, sing their songs and worship their Goddess, and then one at a time the Indians would be brought to the mammoth."

"But of course they never threw you over?" I remarked casually.

"No. I suppose they would have done so, but the Queen took a fancy to me and told them I was a God from the skies, just as she was, and as they worshiped her, they believed her—at least for awhile."

"And you did not try to escape?"

"Why should I try to? Did you see her picture on the rocks? Can you imagine a normal man trying to escape from a woman as beautiful as she was? I tell you that we acted like Gods in the daytime, but at night she was just a woman and I was very much of a man. The brown people worshiped her and because of that they tolerated me. We learned to talk to each other though at first we only used signs. But pantomime is very effective when a man and woman love each other.

"Once a year we all gathered here, right where we are now, for the yearly sacrifice. She would sit on this rock, almost nude, covered only with gold ornaments, anklets, bracelets, armlets, her snake in one hand and a ripe ear of corn in the other. I would sit near her. The brown people would build the fires and sing and dance, and when they beat on their drums the mammoth would sway in time with the music, and at the last, one at a time he would hurl the Indians to their death over two thousand feet below. And then the fires would fade and the brown people one by one leave us, and finally dawn would come and only the Queen and I would be there. And she would kiss me and tell me how happy she was that one more year had passed and I was still alive and able to love her.

"At times when she talked to me I thought she was immortal and would never die, but she said that this was not true. The Brown People had had many Queens. I never was able to find out where they came from. My love looked like a Norsewoman, but she knew nothing about her childhood. Though her people worshiped her she was, in a way, as much of a captive as I was. She thought that somewhere in the caves there was another white girl, growing into womanhood, tenderly

cared for and educated to become the next Queen. At the first sign of old age the Queen simply disappeared and a new one took her place. She remembered the day when she had become Queen.

"I tried to persuade her to escape with me. But she felt that it was useless to try. I suppose she really did not want to. She had lived as a Goddess so long that perhaps she could not have lived as a woman had she wanted to. I can see now that she was rather tangled as far as her thinking about life was concerned."

"I SUPPOSE you know that this is all rather hard for me to believe," I said. "I have no doubt that you think you are telling me the truth, but, at the same time, this is 1938 and you talk as though this experience happened yesterday instead of seven hundred years ago."

"I realize how you feel. But I have to go on with the story. The thing that we feared happened. She became sick. Knowing that if she died the brown people would probably sacrifice me, she thought of a compromise with her worshipers. The new Queen was to take her place and she was to be the grand sacrifice to their spirit God. I was to be given my liberty, but some day, when they sent for me, I was to come back, and in my turn be hurled through the hole. She told them that she would come back, sit on the stone, once again hold the sacred snake and the ripe ear of corn. They believed her. I gave my promise to return when I was sent for. She told me that for long years I would live on, in different bodies but with the same soul. After my final death we would live through eternity united and unseparated. Did you ever love a woman?"

"Yes."

"Then you know how I felt that last day we spent together. It seemed we could not be close enough together. But night came and the full moon. All that day we had been alone up here with the mammoth. She gave me one of her gold bracelets. Night came and the little people built their fires, sang their songs and sacrificed their captives. Then she walked over to the opening in the rock and started to take off all of her golden jewelry. The little people produced, as though by magic, the new Goddess, a beautiful young girl, and on her they placed all the ornaments, the feathered head-dress and the robe of white deerskin. And then something very unusual and unexpected happened. My beloved stood, nude and beautiful, in spite of her illness, waiting for the elephant to pick her up and hurl her through space. Instead he turned, rushed toward the new Queen, picked her up with his trunk, walked over to the edge of the opening and threw her into space."

"I did not expect that ending," I exclaimed.

"No one did," he replied. "It had a terrifying effect on the brown people. You see the elephant was one of their Gods. Whatever he did was right. Now he had refused the sacrifice. Leaving us they fled down the path, leaving us alone. I went over to my beautiful one and took her in my arms. We simply held each other close till the dawn came. I told you she was sick. When the sun rose I knew she was very sick. And so was the mammoth. He walked around us as though he wanted to help in some way but did not know just what to do. At last he rushed against the rocks, deliberately broke off his tusks and then hurled himself through the circular opening.

"My Goddess knew she was dying. She said she was not afraid of death if only she could meet me afterwards. She asked me to hold her close till she died and then throw her body down into the river, and her last words were:

" 'You will live on and on till the time appointed, and then, when I send for you,

I want you to come up here and join me.'

"I did as she requested. Not easy but it had to be done. And now after all these centuries I have come back."

"I am sorry," I said, "but I cannot believe your story."

"I cannot blame you. The next day I left, and the brown people made no effort to detain me. After that, part of my memory is not clear. I suppose I married and had a son, and he married and had a son, but through the generations my soul lived in the oldest son of the family and that soul never forgot what happened and the promise given. My descendants mated but though we had children the love for this Goddess of Zion remained. They went back finally to Norway. And at long last this body that is called Lief Larson was born.

"From my boyhood I had dreams of the long past. I never married but lived and loved a dream woman, the white Queen of Zion."

"I still do not believe you," I insisted.

"I am going to make you believe me. After my beloved died I took the mammoth's tusks and the gold bracelet and buried them under a cairn of stones. See that pile of rock over there? Under it are the ivory and the gold. I am going to uncover them."

I told myself that this was 1938 and such a story could not be true. But he threw stone after stone to this side and that and at last pulled out two tusks, over six feet long, and a massive piece of gold.

"We will sleep here tonight," he said softly. "Tomorrow you will go back by yourself. At midnight use the binoculars. The brown people may come back. Even the mammoth may be reincarnated. And you will see what you will see."

"Don't do it, Larson," I urged, putting my hand on his shoulder. "You are sick, very ill, more so than you think. Rest awhile and then go back with me. Let me take you to a hospital where you can recover from this wild delusion."

He shook his head.

"I love her, Mr. Erickson. For centuries I have waited for her. This time, if we are united, we will never be separated. We will live happily, lovingly through the ages. I tell you she is waiting for me. How can I fail her? Would you disappoint the woman you loved?"

"Perhaps you will feel better tomorrow morning."

"I will feel better but no different. But it has been a hard day for both of us. Suppose we go to sleep."

I SLEPT in spite of the hard stone bed, in spite of my nervousness. It was the sleep of utter exhaustion and with it came dreams. I thought I saw Larson with a wonder woman in his arms. The mammoth stood beside them. Little men came carrying firewood. Drums beat! But when I woke with the dawn Larson and I were alone on the rock. He told me to go and take the flashlight and his car keys. He made me promise I would watch the circular opening at midnight. And he thanked me for coming with him and listening to his story and ended by saying that he was very happy because he had spent the night with the Goddess of Zion, and knew that the end was going to be a glorious one. The last thing he did was to give me the gold bracelet to keep in memory of his wonder woman and their great love.

It was much easier going down the mountain than coming up it. I had little difficulty finding the way. When I came to the rock pictures I sat down for over an hour, making copies of some of the pictures in my notebook. The colors seemed more brilliant than they had the day before. Had I been an artist I would have drawn the Goddess of Zion.

It was nearly dark when I finally arrived at the two automobiles. I opened Lar-

son's car, found the binoculars, locked it and drove back to the lodge in my own automobile. There I ate a much needed supper.

By eleven that night I was back to the place by the road where Larson's car was parked. There was a full moon and a wonderfully clear star-studded sky. The white mountain loomed high in the air and at the top was a circle of red. "A forest fire back in the mountains!" I whispered to myself. The rolling throb of drums came to me. "Thunder from the clouds," I said. All the time I was trying to think clearly, to tell myself that it just simply was not true, that such things could not happen in 1938. Then I took the binoculars and focussed on the circular opening and saw a mammoth against a background of flame and in front of him stood a man, holding in his arms a woman with feathers in her hair and they seemed to be kissing each other.

And then the mammoth took the two of them in the circle of his trunk and threw them into space.

I found the crushed body of Larson near the river bed the next day. The authorities believed the story I told them, which I fabricated simply because I knew they would not believe the real one. They identified him from papers in his pocket, located his car and the coroner decided that it was suicide. Perhaps it was. But I still have the binoculars and the gold bracelet and the pictures in my notebook. Some day when I recover from my mental confusion I am going back and try to find the trail and the rock pictures.

Unless I do find them I think it would be best to simply think that it was all a dream.

"You were born only for this single supreme moment — you exist only that I may kill you."

House of the Hatchet

By ROBERT BLOCH

A spirit was chained to the blood-stained block—a force of hatred born when a woman died.

DAISY and I were enjoying one of our usual quarrels. It started over the insurance policy this time, but after we threshed that out we went into the regular routine Both of us had our cues down perfectly.

"Why don't you go out and get a job like other men instead of sitting around the house pounding a typewriter all day?"

"You knew I was a writer when I married you. If you were so hot to hitch up with a professional man you ought to have married that brokendown interne you ran around with. You'd know where

he was all day; out practising surgery by dissecting hamburgers in that Chili parlor down the street."

"Oh you needn't be so sarcastic. At least George would do his best to be a good provider."

"I'll say he would. He provided me with a lot of laughs ever since I met him."

"That's the trouble with you—you and your superior attitude! Think you're better than anybody else. Here we are, practically starving, and you have to pay installments on a new car just to show it off to your movie friends. And on top of that you go and take out a big policy on me just to be able to brag about how you're 'protecting' your family. I wish I *had* married George—at least he'd bring home some of that hamburger to eat when he finished work. What do you expect me to live on, used carbon paper and old typewriter ribbons?"

"Well, how the devil can I help it if the stuff doesn't sell? I figured on that contract deal but it fell through. You're the one that's always beefing about money—who do you think I am, the goose that laid the golden egg?"

"You've been laying plenty of eggs with those last stories you sent out."

"Funny. Very funny. But I'm getting just a little tired of your second-act dialogue, Daisy."

"So I've noticed. You'd like to change partners and dance, I suppose. Perhaps you'd rather exchange a little sparkling repartee with that Jeanne Corey. Oh, I've noticed the way you hung around her that night over at Ed's place. You couldn't have got much closer without turning into a corset."

"Now listen, you leave Jeanne's name out of this."

"Oh, I'm supposed to leave Jeanne's name out of it, eh? Your wife mustn't take the name of your girl-friend in vain. Well, darling, I always knew you were a swift worker, but I didn't think it had gone that far. Have you told her that she's your inspiration yet?"

"Damn it, Daisy, why must you go twisting around everything I say—"

"Why don't you insure her, too? Big-army insurance—you could probably get a policy issued by Brigham Young."

"Oh, turn it off, will you? A fine act to headline our anniversary, I must say."

"Anniversary?"

"Today's May 18th, isn't it?"

"May 18th—"

"Yeah. Here, shrew."

"Why—honey, its a necklace—"

"Yeah. Just a little dividend on the bonds of matrimony."

"Honey—you bought this for me?—with all our bills and—"

"Never mind that. And quit gasping in my ear, will you? You sound like Little Eva before they hoist her up with the ropes."

"Darling, it's so beautiful. Here."

"Aw, Daisy. Now see what you've done. Made me forget where we left off quarreling. Oh, well."

"Our anniversary. And to think I forgot!"

"Well, I didn't. Daisy."

"Yes?"

"I've been thinking—that is, well, I'm just a sentimental cuss at heart, and I was sort of wondering if you'd like to hop in the car and take a run out along the Prentiss Road."

"You mean like the day we—eloped?"

"Um, hum."

"Of course, darling. I'd love to. Oh, honey, where *did* you get this necklace?"

That's how it was. Just one of those things. Daisy and I, holding our daily sparring match. Usually it kept us in trim. Today, though, I began to get the feeling that we had over-trained. We'd quarreled that way for months, on and

off. I don't know why; I wouldn't be able to define "incompatability" if I saw it on my divorce-papers. I was broke, and Daisy was a shrew. Let it go at that.

But I felt pretty clever when I dragged out my violin for the *Hearts and Flowers*. Anniversary, necklace, re-tracing the honeymoon route; it all added up. I'd found a way to keep Daisy quiet without stuffing a mop into her mouth.

She was sentimentally happy and I was self-congratulatory as we climbed into the car and headed up Wilshire towards Prentiss Road. We still had a lot to say to each other, but in repetition it would be merely nauseating. When Daisy felt good she went in for baby-talk—which struck me as being about as much in character as Boris Karloff playing the part of Caspar Milquetoast.

But for a while we were both happy. I began to kid myself that it was just like old times; we really were the same two kids running away on our crazy elopement. Daisy had just "gotten off" from the beauty parlor and I'd just sold my script series to the agency, and we were running down to Valos to get married. It was the same spring weather, the same road, and Daisy snuggled close to me in the same old way.

But it wasn't the same. Daisy wasn't a kid any more; there were no lines in her face, but there was a rasp in her voice. She hadn't taken on any weight, but she'd taken on a load of querulous ideas. I was different, too. Those first few radio sales had set the pace; I began to run around with the big-shots, and that costs money. Only lately I hadn't made any sales, and the damned expenses kept piling up, and every time I tried to get any work done at the house there was Daisy nagging away. Why did we have to buy a new car? Why did we have to pay so much rent? Why such an insurance policy? Why did I buy three suits?

So I buy her a necklace and she shuts up. There's a woman's logic for you.

Oh well, I figured, today I'll forget it. Forget the bills, forget her nagging, forget Jeanne—though that last was going to be hard. Jeanne was quiet, and she had a private income, and she thought baby-talk was silly. Oh well.

We drove on to Prentiss Road and took the old familiar route. I stopped my little stream-of-consciousness act and tried to get into the mood. Daisy *was* happy; no doubt of that. We'd packed an overnight bag, and without mentioning it we both knew we'd stay at the hotel in Valos, just as we had three years ago when we were married.

Three years of drab, nagging monotony—

But I wasn't going to think about that. Better to think about Daisy's pretty blond curls gleaming in the afternoon sunshine; to think about the pretty green hills doing ditto in the afternoon ditto. I was spring, the spring of three years ago, and all life lay before us—down the white concrete road that curved across the hills to strange heights of achievement beyond.

So we drove on, blithely enough. She pointed out the signs and I nodded or grunted or said "Uh-uh" and the first thing I knew we were four hours on the road and it was getting past afternoon and I wanted to get out and stretch my legs and besides—

THERE it lay. I couldn't have missed the banner. And even if I did, there was Daisy, squealing in my ear.

"Oh, honey—look."

CAN YOU TAKE IT?

THE HOUSE OF TERROR

VISIT A GENUINE, AUTHENTIC HAUNTED HOUSE

And in smaller lettering, beneath, further enticements were listed.

"See the Kluva Mansion! Visit the Haunted Chamber—see the Axe used by the Mad Killer! DO THE DEAD RETURN? Visit the HOUSE OF TERROR —only genuine attraction of its kind. ADMISSION—25c."

Of course I didn't read all this while slashing by at 60 m.p.h. We pulled up as Daisy tugged my shoulder, and while she read, I looked at the large, rambling frame building. It looked like dozens of others we passed on the road; houses occupied by "swamis" and "mediums" and "Yogi Psychologists." For this was the lunatic fringe where the quacks fed on the tourist trade. But here was a fellow with a little novelty. He had something a bit different. That's what I thought.

But Daisy evidently thought a lot more.

"Ooh, honey, let's go in."

"What?"

"I'm so stiff from all this driving, and besides, maybe they sell hot dogs inside or something and I'm hungry."

Well. That was Daisy. Daisy the sadist. Daisy the horror-movie fan. She didn't fool me for a minute. I knew all about my wife's pretty little tastes. She was a thrill-addict. Shortly after our marriage she'd let down the bars and started reading the more lurid murder trial news aloud to me at breakfast. She began to leave ghastly magazines around the house. Pretty soon she was dragging me to all the mystery-pictures. Just another one of her annoying habits—I could close my eyes at any time and conjure up the drone of her voice, tense with latent excitement, as she read about the Cleveland torso slayings, or the latest hatchet-killing.

Evidently nothing was too synthetic for her tastes. Here was an old shack that in its palmiest days was no better than a tenement house for goats; a dump with a lurid side-show banner flung in front of the porch—and still she had to go in. "Haunted House" got her going. Maybe that's what had happened to our marriage. I would have pleased her better by going around the house in a black mask, purring like Bela Lugosi with bronchitis, and caressing her with a hatchet.

I ATTEMPTED to convey some of the pathos of my thoughts in the way I replied, "What the blazes?" but it was a losing battle. Daisy had her hand on the car door. There was a smile on her face —a smile that did queer things to her lips. I used to see that smile when she read the murder-news; it reminded me, unpleasantly, of a hungry cat's expression while creeping up on a robin. She was a shrew and she was a sadist.

But what of it? This was a second honeymoon; no time to spoil things just when I'd fixed matters up. Kill half an hour here and then on to the hotel in Valos.

"Come *on!*"

I jerked out of my musings to find Daisy halfway up the porch. I locked the car, pocketed the keys, joined her before the dingy door. It was getting misty in the late afternoon and the clouds rolled over the sun. Daisy knocked impatiently. The door opened slowly, after a long pause in the best haunted-house tradition. This was the cue for a sinister face to poke itself out and emit a greasy chuckle. Daisy was just itching for that, I knew.

Instead she got W. C. Fields.

Well, not quite. The proboscis was smaller, and not so red. The cheeks were thinner, too. But the checked suit, the squint, the jowls, and above all that "step right up gentlemen" voice were all in the tradition.

"Ah. Come in, come in. Welcome to Kluva Mansion, my friends, welcome."

The cigar fingered us forward. "Twenty-five cents, please. Thank you."

There we were in the dark hallway. It really was dark, and there certainly was a musty enough odor, but I knew damned well the house wasn't haunted by anything but cockroaches. Our comic friend would have to do some pretty loud talking to convince me; but then, this was Daisy's show.

"It's a little late, but I guess I've got time to show you around. Just took a party through about fifteen minutes ago —big party from San Diego. They drove all the way up just to see the Kluva Mansion, so I can assure you you're getting your money's worth."

All right, buddy, cut out the assuring, and let's get this over with. Trot out your zombies, give Daisy a good shock with an electric battery or something, and we'll get out of here.

"Just what is this haunted house and how did you happen to come by it?" asked Daisy. One of those original questions she was always thinking up. She was brilliant like that all the time. Just full of surprises.

"Well, it's like this, lady. Lots of folks ask me that and I'm only too glad to tell them. This house was built by Ivan Kluva—don't know if you remember him or not—Russian movie director, came over here about '23 in the old silent days, right after DeMille began to get popular with his spectacle pictures. Kluva was an "epic" man; had quite a European reputation, so they gave him a contract. He put up this place, lived here with his wife. Aren't many folks left in the movie colony that remember old Ivan Kluva; he never really got to direct anything either.

"First thing he did was to mix himself up with a lot of foreign cults. This was way back, remember; Hollywood had some queer birds then. Prohibition, and a lot of wild parties; dope addicts, all kinds of scandals, and some stuff that never did get out. There was a bunch of devil-worshippers and mystics, too—not like these fakes down the road; genuine article. Kluva got in with them.

"I guess he was a little crazy, or got that way. Because one night, after some kind of gathering here, he murdered his wife. In the upstairs room, on a kind of an altar he rigged up. He just took a hatchet to her and hacked off her head. Then he disappeared. The police looked in a couple of days later; they found her, of course, but they never did locate Kluva. Maybe he jumped off the cliffs behind the house. Maybe—I've heard stories—he killed her as a sort of sacrifice so he could *go away*. Some of the cult members were grilled, and they had a lot of wild stories about worshipping things or beings that granted boons to those who gave them human sacrifices; such boons as *going away* from Earth. Oh, it was crazy enough, I guess, but the police did find a damned funny statue behind the altar that they didn't like and never showed around, and they burned a lot of books and things they got hold of here. Also they chased that cult out of California."

All this corny chatter rolled out in a drone and I winced. Now I'm only a two-bit gag-writer, myself, but I was thinking that if I went in for such things I could improvise a better story than this poorly-told yarn and I could ad-lib it more effectively than this bird seemed able to do with daily practice. It sounded so stale, so flat, so unconvincing. The rottenest "thriller plot" in the world.

Or—

IT STRUCK me then. Perhaps the story was true. Maybe this was the solution. After all, there were no supernatural elements yet. Just a dizzy Rus-

sian devil-worshipper murdering his wife with a hatchet. It happens once in a while; psychopathology is full of such records. And why not? Our comic friend merely bought the house after the murder, cooked up his "haunt" yarn, and capitalized.

Evidently my guess was correct, because old bugle-beak sounded off again.

"And so, my friends, the deserted Kluva Mansion remained, alone and untenanted. Not utterly untenanted, though. There was the ghost. Yes, the ghost of Mrs. Kluva—the Lady in White."

Phooey! Always it has to be the Lady in White. Why not in pink, for a change, or green? Lady in White—sounds like a burlesque headliner. And so did our spieler. He was trying to push his voice down into his fat stomach and make it impressive.

"Every night she walks the upper corridor to the murder chamber. Her slit throat shines in the moonlight as she lays her head once again on the blood-stained block, again receives the fatal blow, and with a groan of torment, disappears into thin air."

Hot air, you mean, buddy.

"Oooh," said Daisy. "She would."

"I say the house was deserted for years. But there were tramps, vagrants, who broke in from time to time to stay the night. They stayed the night—and longer. Because in the morning they were always found—on the murder block, with their throats chopped by the murder axe."

I wanted to say "Axe-ually?" but then, I have my better side. Daisy was enjoying this so; her tongue was almost hanging out.

"After a while nobody would come here; even the tramps shunned the spot. The real estate people couldn't sell it. Then I rented. I knew the story would attract visitors, and frankly, I'm a business man."

Thanks for telling me, brother. I thought you were a fake.

"And now, you'd like to see the murder chamber? Just follow me, please. Up the stairs, right this way. I've kept everything just as it always was, and I'm sure you'll be more than interested in—"

Daisy pinched me on the dark stairway. "Ooh, sugar, aren't you thrilled?"

I don't like to be called "sugar." And the idea of Daisy actually finding something "thrilling" in this utterly ridiculous farce was almost nauseating. For a moment I could have murdered her myself. Maybe Kluva had something there at that.

The stairs creaked, and the dusty windows allowed a sepulchral light to creep across the mouldy floor as we followed the waddling showman down the black hallway. A wind seemed to have sprung up outside, and the house shook before it, groaning in torment.

Daisy giggled nervously. In the movie-show she always twisted my lapel-buttons off when the monster came into the room where the girl was sleeping. She was like that now—hysterical.

I felt as excited as a stuffed herring in a pawnshop.

W. C. opened a door down the hall and fumbled around inside. A moment later he reappeared carrying a candle and beckoned us to enter the room. Well, that was a little better. Showed some imagination, anyway. The candle was effective in the gathering darkness; it cast blotches of shadow over the walls and caused shapes to creep in the corners.

"Here we are," he almost whispered.

And there we were.

Now I'm not psychic. I'm not even highly imaginative. When Orson Welles is yammering on the radio I'm down at the hamburger stand listening to the Raymond Scott Quintette. But when I entered that room I *knew* that it, at least,

wasn't a fake. The air reeked of murder. The shadows ruled over a domain of death. It was cold in here, cold as a charnel-house. And the candle-light fell on the great bed in the corner, then moved to the center of the room and covered a monstrous bulk. The murder block.

It was something like an altar, at that. There was a niche in the wall behind it, and I could almost imagine a statue being placed there. What kind of a statue? A black bat, inverted and crucified? Devil-worshippers used that, didn't they? Or was it another and more horrible kind of idol? The police had destroyed it. But the block was still there, and in the candle-light I saw the stains. They trickled over the rough sides.

Daisy moved closer to me and I could feel her tremble.

Kluva's chamber. A man with an axe, holding a terrified woman across the block; the strength of inspired madness in his eyes, and in his hands, an axe—

"It was here, on the night of January twelfth, nineteen twenty-four, that Ivan Kluva murdered his wife with—"

The fat man stood by the door, chanting out his listless refrain. But for some reason I listened to every word. Here in this room, those words were real. They weren't scareheads on a sideshow banner; here in the darkness they had meaning. A man and his wife, and murder. Death is just a word you read in the newspaper. But some day it becomes real; dreadfully real. Something the worms whisper in your ears as they chew. Murder is a word, too. It is the power of death, and sometimes there are men who exercise that power, like gods. Men who kill are like gods. They take away life. There is something cosmically obscene about the thought. A shot fired in drunken frenzy, a blow struck in anger, a bayonet plunged in the madness of war, an accident, a car-crash—these things are part of life. But a man, any man, who lives with the thought of Death; who thinks and plans a deliberate, cold-blooded murder—

To sit there at the supper table, looking at his wife, and saying, "Twelve o'clock. You have five more hours to live, my dear. Five more hours. Nobody knows that. Your friends don't know it. Even you don't know it. No one knows—except myself. Myself, and Death. I am Death. Yes. I am Death to you. I shall numb your body and your brain, I shall be your lord and master. You were born, you have lived, only for this single supreme moment; that I shall command your fate. You exist only that I may kill you."

Yes, it was obscene. And then, this block, and a hatchet.

"Come upstairs, dear," And his thoughts, grinning behind the words. Up the dark stairs to the dark room, where the block and hatchet waited.

I wondered if he hated her. No, I suppose not. If the story was true, he had sacrified her for a purpose. She was just the most handy, the most convenient person to sacrifice. He must have had blood like the water under the polar peaks.

IT WAS the room that did it, not the story. I could feel him in the room, and I could feel *her*.

Yes, that was funny. Now I could feel *her*. Not as a being, not as a tangible presence, but as a force. A restless force. Something that stirred in back of me before I turned my head. Something hiding in the deeper shadows. Something in the blood-stained block. A chained spirit.

"Here I died. I ended here. One minute I was alive, unsuspecting. The next found me gripped by the ultimate horror

of Death. The hatchet came down across my throat, so full of life, and sliced it out. Now I wait. I wait for others, for there is nothing left to me but revenge. I am not a person any longer, nor a spirit. I am merely a force—a force created as I felt my life slip away from my throat. For at that moment I knew but one feeling with my entire dying being; a feeling of utter, cosmic hatred. Hatred at the sudden injustice of what had happened to me. The force was born then when I died; it is all that is left of me. Hatred. Now I wait, and sometimes I have a chance to let the hatred escape. By killing another I can feel the hatred rise, wax, grow strong. Then for a brief moment I rise, wax, grow strong; feel real again, touch the hem of life's robe, which once I wore. Only by surrendering to my dark hate can I survive in death. And so I lurk; lurk here in this room. Stay too long and I shall return. Then, in the darkness, I seek your throat and the blade bites and I taste again the ecstasy of reality."

The old drizzle-puss was elaborating his story, but I couldn't hear him for my thoughts. Then all at once he flashed something out across my line of vision; something that was like a stark shadow against the candle-light.

It was a hatchet.

I felt, rather than heard, when Daisy went "Ooooh!" beside me. Looking down I stared into two blue mirrors of terror that were her eyes. I had thought plenty, and what her imaginings had been I could guess. The old bird was stolid enough, but he brandished that hatchet, that hatchet with the rusty blade, and it got so I couldn't look at anything else but the jagged edge of the hatchet. I couldn't hear or see or think anything; there was that hatchet, the symbol of Death. There was the real crux of the story; not in the man or the woman, but in that tiny razor-edge line. That razor-edge was really Death. That razor-edge spelled doom to all living things. Nothing in the world was greater than that razor-edge. No brain, no power, no love, no hate could withstand it.

And it swooped out in the man's hands and I tore my eyes away and looked at Daisy, at anything, just to keep the black thought down. And I saw Daisy, her face that of a tortured Medusa.

Then she slumped.

I caught her. Bugle-beak looked up with genuine surprise.

"My wife's fainted," I said.

He just blinked. Didn't know what the score was, at first. And a minute later I could swear he was just a little bit pleased. He thought his story had done it, I suppose.

Well, this changed all plans. No Valos, no drive before supper.

"Any place around here where she can lie down?" I asked. "No, not in this room."

"My wife's bedroom is down the hall," said Bugle-beak.

His wife's bedroom, eh? But no one stayed here after dark, he had said—the damned old fake!

This was no time for quibbling. I carried Daisy into the room down the hall, chafed her wrists.

"Shall I send my wife up to take care of her?" asked the now solicitous showman.

"No, don't bother. Let me handle her; she gets these things every so often—hysteria, you know. But she'll have to rest a while."

He shuffled down the hall, and I sat there cursing. Damn the woman, it was just like her! But too late to alter circumstances now. And at least she had her mouth shut. I decided to let her sleep it off.

I went downstairs in the darkness, groping my way. And I was only halfway

down when I heard a familiar pattering strike the roof. Sure enough—a typical West Coast heavy dew was falling. Fine thing, too; dark as pitch outside.

Well, there was the set-up. Splendid melodrama background. I'd been dragged to movies for years and it was always the same as this.

The young couple caught in a haunted house by a thunderstorm. The mysterious evil caretaker. (Well, maybe he wasn't, but he'd have to do until a better one came along.) The haunted room. The fainting girl, asleep and helpless in the bedroom. Enter Boris Karloff dressed in three pounds of nose-putty. "Grrrrrrr!" says Boris. "Eeeeeeeeh!" says the girl. "What's that?" shouts Inspector Toozefuddy from downstairs. And than a mad chase. "Bang! Bang!" And Boris Karloff falls down into an open manhole. Girl gets frightened. Boy gets girl. Formula.

I thought I was pretty clever when I turned on the burlesque thought pattern, but when I got down to the foot of the stairs I knew that I was playing hide-and-go-seek with my thoughts. Something dark and cold was creeping around in my brain, and I was trying hard to avoid it. Something to do with Ivan Kluva and his wife and the haunted room and the hatchet. Suppose there was a ghost and Daisy was lying up there alone and—

"HAM and eggs?"

"What the—" I turned around. There was Bugle-beak at the foot of the stairs.

"I said, would you care for some ham and eggs? Looks pretty bad outside and so long as the Missus is resting I thought maybe you'd like to join the wife and me in a little supper."

I could have kissed him, nose and all.

We went into the back. Mrs. was just what you'd expect; thin woman in her middle forties, wearing a patient look. The place was quite cosy, though; she had fixed up several rooms as living quarters. I began to have a little more respect for Bugle-beak. Poor showman though he was, he seemed to be making a living in a rather novel way. And his wife was an excellent cook.

The rain thundered down. Something about a little lighted room in the middle of a storm that makes you feel good inside. Confidential. Mrs. Keenan—Bugle-beak introduced himself as Homer Keenan—suggested that I might take a little brandy up to Daisy. I demurred, but Keenan perked up his ears—and nose—at the mention of brandy and suggested we have a little. The *little* proved to be a half-gallon jug of fair peach-brandy, and we filled our glasses. As the meal progressed we filled them again. And again. The liquor helped to chase that dark thought away, or almost away. But it still bothered me. And so I got Homer Keenan into talking. Better a boring conversation than a boring thought—boring little black beetle of thought, chewing away in your brain.

"So after the carny folded I got out from under. Put over a little deal in Tia and cleaned up but the Missus kind of wanted to settle down. Tent business in this country all shot to blazes anyway. Well, I knew this Feingerber from the old days, like I say—and he put me up to this house. Yeah, sure, that part is genuine enough. There was an Ivan Kluva and he did kill his wife here. Block and axe genuine too; I got a state permit to keep 'em. Museum, this is. But the ghost story, of course that's just a fake. Get's them in, though. Some week-ends we play to capacity crowds ten hours a day. Makes a nice thing of it. We live here—say, let's have another nip of this brandy, whaddya say? Come on, it won't hurt you. Get it from a Mex down the road a ways."

Fire. Fire in the blood. What did he

mean the ghost story was fake? When I went into that room I smelled murder. I thought *his* thoughts. And then I had thought *hers*. Her hate was in that room; and if it wasn't a ghost, what was it? Somehow it all tied in with that black thought I had buzzing in my head; that damned black thought all mixed up with the axe and hate, and poor Daisy lying up there helpless. Fire in my head. Brandy fire. But not enough. I could still think of Daisy, and all at once something blind gripped me and I was afraid and I trembled all over, and I couldn't wait. Thinking of her like that, all alone in the storm, near the murder-room and the block and the hatchet— I knew I must go to her. I couldn't stand the horrid suspicion.

I got up like a fool, mumbled something about looking after her, and ran up the black staircase. I was trembling, trembling, until I reached her bedside and saw how peacefully she lay there. Her sleep was quite untroubled. She was even smiling. She didn't know. She wasn't afraid of ghosts and hatchets. Looking at her I felt utterly ridiculous, but I did stare down at her for a long time until I regained control of myself once again. . . .

When I went downstairs the liquor had hit me and I felt drunk. The thought was gone from my brain now, and I was beginning to experience relief.

Keenan had refilled my glass for me, and when I gulped it down he followed suit and immediately poured again. This time we sat down to a real gab-fest.

I began to talk. I felt like an unwinding top. Everything began to spin out of my throat. I told about my life; my "career," such as it was; my romance with Daisy, even. Just felt like it. The liquor.

Before you know it I was pulling a True Confession of my own, with all the trimmings. How things stood with Daisy and me. Our foolish quarrels. Her nagging. Her touchiness about things like our car, and the insurance, and Jeanne Corey. I was maudlin enough to be petty. I picked on her habits. Then I began to talk about this trip of ours, and my plans for a second honeymoon, and it was only instinct that shut me up before becoming actually disgusting.

Keenan adopted an older "man-of-the-world" attitude, but he finally broke down enough to mention a few of his wife's salient deficiencies. What I told him about Daisy's love for the horrors prompted him to tease his wife concerning her own timidity. It developed that while she knew the story was a fake, she still shied away from venturing upstairs after nightfall—just as though the ghost were real.

Mrs. Keenan bridled. She denied everything. Why she'd go upstairs any time at all. Any time at all.

"How about now? It's almost midnight. Why not go up and take a cup of coffee to that poor sick woman?" Keenan sounded like somebody advising Little Red Riding-Hood to go see her grandmother.

"Don't bother," I assured him. "The rain's dying down. I'll go up and get her and we'll be on our way. We've got to get to Valos, you know."

"Think I'm afraid, eh?" Mrs. Keenan was already doing things with the coffee pot. Rather dizzily, but she managed.

"No, no—but really—"

"You men, always talking about your wives. I'll show you!" She took the cup, then arched her back eloquently as she passed Keenan and disappeared in the hallway.

I GOT an urge.

Sobriety rushed to my head.

"Keenan," I whispered.

"Whazzat?"

"Keenan, we must stop her!"

"What for?"

"You ever gone upstairs at night?"

"Course not. Why sh'd I? All dusty

up there, mus' keep it tha'way for cust'mers. Never go up.'

"Then how do you know the story isn't true?" I talked fast. Very.

"What?"

"I say perhaps there *is* a ghost."

"Aw, go on!"

"Keenan, I tell you I felt something up there. You're so used to the place you didn't notice, but I *felt* it. A woman's hate, Keenan. A woman's hate!" I was almost screaming; I dragged him from his chair and tried to push him into the hall. I had to stop her somehow. I was afraid.

"That room is filled with menace." Quickly I explained my thoughts of the afternoon concerning the dead woman—surprised and slain, so that she died only with a great hate forming as life left her; a hate that endured, that thrived on death alone. A hate, embodied, that would take up the murder hatchet and slay—

"Stop your wife, Keenan," I screamed. "Stop her!"

"What about your wife?" chuckled the showman. "Besides," and he leered, drunkenly, "I'll tell you somethin' I wasn't gonna tell. It's *all* a fake." He winked. I still pushed him towards the staircase.

"All a fake," he wheezed. "Not only ghost part. But—there never was a Ivan Kluva, never was no wife. Never was no killing. Jus' old butcher's block. Hatchet's my hatchet. No murder, no ghost, nothin' to be afraid of. Good joke, make myself bones' dollar. All a fake!"

"Come on!" I screamed, and the black thought came back and it sang in my brain and I tried to drag him up the stairs, knowing it was too late, but still I had to do something—

And then *she* screamed.

I heard it. She was running out of the room, down the hall. And at the head of the stairs she screamed again, but the scream turned into a gurgle. It was black up there, but out of the blackness tottered her silhouette. Down the stairs she rolled; bump, bump, bump. Same sound as a rubber ball. But she was a woman, and she ended up at the bottom of the stairs with the axe still stuck in her throat.

Right there I should have turned and run, but that thing inside my head wouldn't let me. I just stood there as Keenan looked down at the body of his wife, and I babbled it all out again.

"I hated her—you don't understand how those little things count—and Jeanne waiting—there was the insurance—if I did it at Valos no one would ever know—here was accident, but better."

"There is no ghost," Keenan mumbled. He didn't even hear me. "There is no ghost." I stared at the slashed throat.

"When I saw the hatchet and she fainted, it came over me. I could get you drunk, carry her out, and you'd never know—"

"What killed her?" he whispered. "There is no ghost."

I thought again of my theory of a woman's hate surviving death and existing thereafter only with an urge to slay. I thought of that hate, embodied, grabbing up a hatchet and slaying, saw Mrs. Keenan fall, then glanced up at the darkness of the hall as the grinning song in my brain rose, forcing me to speak.

"There is a ghost now," I whispered. "You see, the second time I went up to see Daisy I killed her with this hatchet."

The town in the mirage was real—so long as its laws were not broken.

Mirage

By O. M. CABRAL

PETE SPINELLI, gasping, sprawled flat upon scorching sand. The thin shadow of a scrubby Judas-tree laced his prone body with sable bars.

"Hey!" Red Donovan urged him. "Didja hear me? I said get up!"

But Pete scarcely stirred. His puffed lips, hideously blackened and cracked, could not form words clearly.

"T'ell w' ya. I—ain't—never."

" 'S only a little ways more," Red Donovan croaked.

"Same—'s yest'day. . . ."

Donovan's red-rimmed eyes narrowed. Then he kicked Pete. The spent man moaned, but made no other sign of protest.

Donovan bent over him.

"You're sticking—get it? This'll give ya ambition!"

Donovan's thumb gouged brutally at the base of Pete's skull. Pete's flaccid body jerked. A shrill whine burst from his calcined throat when a second stab of torture pierced beneath an armpit.

"Lemme 'lone! I'll—go—"

"Snap inta it, then!" Donovan growled. He laughed when Pete stumbled awkwardly to his feet. "Ya yella rat, ya oughta *thank* me for this!"

Pete staggered, his feet dragging in loose, flinty sand. Maybe, Red Donovan thought disgustedly, he should have left Pete to croak back there under the bush. Only, anyone following might have found the stiff.

Vitreous sunlight spilled on the arid landscape, painful to heat-dazed eyes. All day yesterday a hot wind had covered the fugitives' tracks with blown sand and bitter alkali. Now distant mountains, minute but sharp and clear against a metallic sky, seemed to recede all through the crystal morning.

On the bare mountains there was water—had to be! Pete wouldn't make it, Red Donovan thought. He'd have to be left out of sight in some dry arroyo. Cave down the bank—hide the corpse. Because them damned buzzards would put the finger on a guy if he didn't play wise.

The heat played queer tricks. Sometimes the mountains looked nearer, bigger. They wavered tantalizingly as though painted on a bright blue curtain, or hung suspended in air, an enchanted island swimming on an ocean of glass.

Whenever Pete paused Red Donovan prodded his back with the hot barrel of a gun. Pete moaned, but he walked. A vague mistiness ahead troubled Donovan. His eyes hurt when he blinked as though dry eyeballs had been scoured with dust of glass. Was it—Jeez, was it a cloud of dust? Horses—and men?

The cloud of translucent haze did glitter with pulsating movement. In its midst, an image built up swiftly out of nothing—water and trees, glimmering white buildings of a little town. But the far-away mountains were still in sight, veiled and indistinct through the wavering illusion of the mirage.

Pete paused. Suddenly his head flung up like a pointing hound. He yelped, and began running, crazily, drunkenly, toward that false promise of bright water.

"Pete!" Red Donovan yelled hoarsely. "Wanna kill yourself, ya damned fool?"

The thirst-crazed man ahead ran clumsily, hearing nothing. Red Donovan shouted trying to tell him that there was no water, no trees, only a picture painted on the sand. Then he, too, started running after Pete Spinelli.

The mirage had all the appearance of solid reality. A thin point of madness entered Red Donovan's mind. He could not stop running. Pete fell. Donovan passed him without even glancing down. The town seemed so near! Clearly Red Donovan saw the black shadows under the green cottonwood trees, and beyond the grove the shiny mirror of cool water! As he neared the houses became more distinct. Vaguely he thought that people moved at the edge of the town.

"Help!" Red Donovan yelped, choking. "Help!"

The cottonwood grove was all about him, the blessed shade like balm to his blistered skin. Donovan panted, weak now and crawling. There was a corral where penned cattle lay munching sleepily in the shade. Beyond the corral some goats were tethered at the edge of a big water-hole. There were gardens and houses, a verdant oasis in the grim Valley of Death.

A woman in a blue sunbonnet stood at the door of one of the white-painted houses. She did not even give the sun-

blackened fugitive a passing glance of pity as he crawled, sobbing, toward the bright shield of water.

RED DONOVAN'S breath was like a death-rattle in his throat when he thrust his face down to the life-giving water. He saw his own reflection—a raw, swollen mask caked with gray alkali. Wind-ripples wrinkled the surface of the water-hole. In the bright shallows of the pond he could see colored gravel and green weeds.

Donovan dipped his scorched arm elbow deep into the crystal water. His cupped hands met nothing but empty air. When he scooped the bright drops to his fevered lips, he tasted only the desert's acrid and powdery dust!

Whimpering, he shrank in terror from the bewitched water. Surely he had felt the cool liquid trickle over his arms! His bulging eyes saw a carpet of lush green grass all about him. Yet, when he tore at the phantom blades, only hot sand filled the scoop of his palm!

Five goats in the grove, a buck and four does, peacefully nibbled green herbage. Red Donovan counted them while his frenzied mind shrieked soundlessly.

The goats munched sleepily, amber eyes voluptuously half-closed. Why—there were the cottonwood leaves—the shadows of the leaves making a splashed pattern of light and shade on grass and water!

Donovan stood up. His glazed eyes stared wildly. Then raving soundlessly, a gaunt scarecrow, he stumbled past the ghostly corral and through the tree-lined street of the phantom town.

Water gurgled in ditches on either side of the street bringing life to spaced trees. Donovan shut his eyes, unable to endure that murmuring torture. Instantly, when his eyes were closed, a breath of wind hot as from an opened oven fanned his blistered cheeks.

A woman passed soundlessly leading a tow-headed child, both real as Donovan himself. Her face was hidden in the shadow of a big poke sunbonnet. A quaint dress flowed to her heels. Red Donovan thrust out an appealing hand.

"Lady! Help—see—I gotta have—"

She heard him! Brown eyes, wide and kind, smiled at Red Donovan. His hand, clutching at the pink gingham of her sleeve, passed through colored shadow. Staring, stone-still, the stricken man saw the woman moving away slow and stately, along the silent street.

Other people, then, peered out from doorways and windows at Red Donovan as he passed. All of those faces were happy and kind and smiling. But they looked at Red Donovan with complete absence of pity. Only two children, leaving their play in a quiet garden, pointed chubby fingers at the scarecrow fugitive. And the children laughed, happy laughter without sound, watching Red Donovan with clear, innocent eyes.

Almost at the edge of the barren desert, a big two-story frame building reared a square fake front. A wide porch faced a raised plank sidewalk above the dusty street. Two chairs tilted against the wall on the porch. There was a vague impression of movement inside. A few bearded men came to the open door of the old-fashioned country store. Blurred faces stared at the newcomer through the one big window.

A little knot of men gathered outside on the porch. One old man, booted feet dangling over the edge of the boardwalk, whittled a thick staff. He glanced up casually, smiling faintly as Donovan staggered near. Red Donovan could go no further. He leaned wearily against a long hitching rack — leaned right through a wooden rail that seemed solid, and fell, sprawling, on dusty sand.

He lay on his back with his face up-

turned. Through closed lids he could see the sky, red, like a bowl of heated metal. Something touched his shoulder. Above the roaring in his ears he could hear the urgent tones of a man's voice calling to him. But he knew there was nothing. Nothing in all the world but sun, sand, and smooth glassy sky.

"Drink, friend," the voice said very faintly. "You will feel better then."

Red Donovan moaned and shuddered away from the ghostly hand. His tongue, swollen and dark, lolled from cracked lips that were stiff with his own dried blood. Glazed eyes fixed on the apparition—a frail old man with longish white hair under a wide-brimmed hat. Blue eyes glinted in a brown face netted with ageless wrinkles.

"Drink," the old man insisted.

Donovan knew that his hands could never clutch the phantom canteen. The old man's face, quaint as the shadow fixed on an old daguerrotype, wavered in the heat-haze, merely an image of tortured imagination. But no! Red Donovan's clawing fingers touched something real and solid!

WATER gurgled from the vent of the canteen, ease for his tortured throat. Donovan gulped and choked, and gulped greedily again. His lips were scarcely wet when the canteen was snatched away from his shaking hands.

"Gimme!" he tried to say, mumbling lips voicing merely an inarticulate whine. "Damn it! You gimme—!"

Frantically he clawed at the old man's retreating arms. Savage disappointment twisted Donovan's face. His hands drew back, trembling. The old man had not moved. Shrewd, friendly blue eyes did not even blink. Illusion, or real? Donovan did not know. He feared the frightful test of touch, the agony of proof that his senses lied.

"Later," the old man said gravely, "you shall have more. You will die, friend, if you are too greedy now."

It seemed to Red Donovan that the words became clearer, more distinct. He could even see the vision, man or ghost, in more exact detail. The old man wore a faded shirt of rough cloth, blue overalls and patched boots. Behind him a pack-laden burro stood patiently with drooping muzzle beside the hitching rack.

"You can get up. Lean on me."

Red Donovan grasped an extended hand, lean and hard. Real! Solid! No ghastly image of the mirage! The old man's arms seemed thin and frail, yet there was quiet power in that steady hand.

The grizzled burro lazily twitched long ears in the bright sunlight. The phantom street where Donovan had stumbled raving did seem to be real and earthly now. Faint sounds assailed his ears—quiet speech and laughter, delicate and faint. From everywhere echoed that damned thin ghostly laughter.

Red Donovan weakly leaned on the old prospector's shoulder, upborne by quiet force that, even now, did not seem quite material — some power other than the strength that resides in bone and muscle.

The old man clucked, driving the laden burro before them along the street. They stopped outside a picket gate where a path led to a cabin set in a garden of phlox and hollyhocks.

It was all real enough now—the hollow thump of their feet on the scrubbed board floor of the kitchen and the cool peace inside the cabin. The gray-haired woman in a wicker rocker peered, questioning, over the square rims of spectacles set on her button nose.

"Our friend has been lost on the sand," the old prospector told the woman. "He has suffered, mother. He needs care."

The woman smiled. Fine wrinkles crumpled the corners of kindly, faded eyes.

"Then why do you keep the poor man standing there? Get him into bed—it's all made up and ready for him. I'll see what else is needed—"

Quietly bustling she arose and threw open a door to show a wide four-poster bed draped with curtains in an adjacent room. The semi-darkness was heavenly pleasant after the torturing glare. Donovan fell on the bed. His eyes closed. He was only dimly aware that the old man cut the shoes from his swollen feet. The woman brought a cup.

"Another sip," said the old man cheerfully. "Then sleep, friend, and we'll make a new man of you!"

Red Donovan gulped. Never had plain water tasted so damned good! He shut his eyes blissfully.

"More after awhile."

That was okay. Everything was jake now. Donovan lay still. He heard, rather vaguely, the old man and the woman stirring about the kitchen.

Disconnected words — "lost — another chance—" failed to carry any meaning to Donovan's brain.

IT MUST have been a long time before the little old woman with crinkly eyes stood beside the bed. Red Donovan, awakening, stared at her feeling helpless and confused under her steady gaze. He was still in that funny old high bed, his body covered with a patchwork counterpane. Chintz curtains were drawn back, admitting spears of sunlight that now had no terrors. Everything in the room looked neat and spotless like the old lady, and like her kind of faded too.

"So you're better, eh? That's fine. You've been a sick man, I tell you. And no wonder!"

Delicious smells from the kitchen reached Donovan's twitching nostrils—something cooking on the big, old-fashioned range.

"You said it, lady!" he gasped weakly. Vague remnants of delirium terror threatened the peace of that quiet chamber. "I—I musta been nuts! Hell! What I can remember, I musta been sick as a dog—"

"Out of your mind," the old lady told him, smiling.

"Jeez, I feel swell now." A hint of reviving mystery troubled him. "Say—what—where is this burg? I dunno."

"Salvation Wells? It's named for the big spring, the only sweet water this side of the mountains."

Red Donovan frowned, trying to think. Shreds of terrible memories fluttered in his mind like colored pennants, nightmare visions—Pete—the flaming desert—before that, the stickup in Mojave.

"You've been in trouble," said the little old lady softly. "Ah, what a pity!"

"Yeah?" Donovan's eyes narrowed with ugly suspicion. "How'd ya figger that out?"

"Fever," she told him simply. "You couldn't help talking, but never fear. You are safe with us."

She went into the kitchen. Donovan leaned back on fresh pillows, his dark thoughts running like questing rats in and out of a maze of risky possibilities. Would he have to kill her—and the old man too? Sure, even in a hick dump like this they'd have radios. They'd grab news right out of the air. Maybe the old mug in the Stetson was figuring, even now, how he could spend the reward.

Something screwy somewhere! Still, at that, the funny old dame couldn't really be sure he was a man with a price on his head. They'd have to wait to find out.

Donovan's shifty eyes glimpsed his clothes neatly folded over the back of a chair. And there, beside the bed, was his gun and—the money!

The stolen bills, neatly stacked, left in plain sight like that! Stealthily Red Donovan's hand crawled toward the gun. He

broke it open beneath the patchwork coverlet. Loaded still—four chambers—one empty shell!

They hadn't touched a thing. What did that mean? Hastily he stowed the money out of sight under the lifted edge of the husk-filled mattress.

The old woman, sunbonnet on her head, looked in at the door. She carried a wicker basket swung on one arm.

"If you feel strong enough, you might dress yourself. It'll do you good to sit on the porch awhile."

Slowly Donovan drew on his clothes freshly washed and ironed. He didn't feel so good, up on his feet. Still weak and dizzy—and he couldn't seem to remember— Aw, hell! No two ways about it, he must have been plenty goofy! Even now it was hard to believe that there wasn't something all wrong.

He could see all of Salvation Wells from the porch. Not much of a dump, at that. A tiny town of one street, a green oasis watered from the flowing well. People were at work in small gardens, or going in or out of the general store. A queer flock of nuts, Donovan thought, amused. All dressed funny. Mormons, maybe—settled down from a long time ago.

The women all wore long dresses buttoned to their necks. All the men were bearded to the eyebrows. A goofy-looking bunch of hicks, everyone with that silly grin plastered on his face! Hell, they *couldn't* know anything about that business back at Mojave, or they wouldn't be turning him loose when they'd had him down. Not this way, with a loaded rod in his pants.

Beyond the sharp limits of the green oasis, sterile plains gashed by bone-dry arroyos swept to a horizon of distant purple haze. At only two points was the infinite circle broken where craggy mountains piled low against turquoise sky.

Red Donovan, feeling stronger, walked along the one short street. Children stared and smiled with disarming friendliness. A young woman nodded in neighborly fashion from an open doorway. Red Donovan chuckled grimly thinking how different it would be if they suspected that death, chill and merciless, had stumbled in among them.

Contempt grew with assurance of temporary safety. The boobs! He had money —some of them must have seen it— enough to buy a dozen such dumps. And they hadn't pinched a nickel! They trusted him—him, Red Donovan! Just as if he was one of themselves, one of their own screwy layout, whatever that was!

Yeah, he'd sure got away with murder. Anyway, for awhile.

FAR out across the plain a horseman appeared riding in toward the little town. Shimmering head distorted the approaching image. Sometimes the horse loped with monstrous strides above the crystalline desert floor; sometimes it shrank to the size of a crawling insect.

Red Donovan, resting on the wide wooden porch of the store, intently watched the approaching rider with wary, slitted eyes. He shifted position to free the gun in his hip pocket. One of the queer townsmen—or bad news?

Then, relieved, he saw presently that the man on horseback wore the baggy homespuns that clothed the men of Salvation Wells.

The stranger's face was powdered with desert dust. Across his saddle were two small leather sacks. A short-handled prospector's pick protruded from a blanket roll lashed behind the saddle.

The horseman nodded to Donovan as he dismounted, unfastened one of the sacks and carried it inside the store. A moment later he reappeared in the doorway.

"Hi, friend!" he called. "Will you drink?"

Donovan grinned assent. Inside, the prospector led the way to a plank counter.

"Now, ain't this something?" Donovan said. "Where's your sign? How'n hell did I know a guy could get alky here?"

"We sell about everything," the bearded storekeeper said cheerfully. He wiped his hands on his blue denim apron. "Everything folks might need—from buttons to babies."

Donovan laughed. The sun-browned horseman lifted his glass.

"Here's luck!"

"Down the hatch!" Donovan answered.

He licked his lips and set down the empty glass. It had a kick—that stuff. Couldn't name it—some kinda local hooch. So they weren't so screwy, at that!

"Do any good, Jake?" the paunchy storekeeper asked the miner casually.

"Not bad." The miner patted the heavy sack on the counter. "And more outside. Weigh it up and see what it comes to."

THE storekeeper methodically set scales on the counter, untied buckskin strings, and ladled out precious yellow dust with a sugar scoop. Red Donovan's eyes fixed on the weighted balance—bulged incredulously. Gold! Precious dust in both sacks! And the bearded boob had left one outside!

"That does it fine. A hundred-eighteen, a teeny bit more or less."

From under the plank counter the storekeeper lifted a wooden box filled with fruit jars. Some were empty, others were filled to the brim. Two held only rough nuggets. Carelessly he tipped the scales. Gold—dull yellow dust—spilled into a jar. The storekeeper pushed the box back under the counter.

"Say!" Donovan, startled beyond caution, voiced his profound amazement. "Ain'tcha gonta lock that stuff up, or something?"

The storekeeper and the bearded miner laughed together as though Donovan had said something amusing and absurd.

"That ain't funny," Donovan objected sulkily. "What I mean, ya can't tell who's got sticky fingers, see?"

They seemed to puzzle out the idea slowly. The storekeeper explained.

"He hasn't been with us long enough. He wouldn't know."

The tall miner then went out. Donovan heard him talking and laughing with someone outside. He turned, almost fiercely, and surprised a maddening smile playing about the paunchy storekeeper's lips.

"Listen!" Red Donovan demanded. "What kind of a dump is this, anyway? I wanta know—what the hell goes on here?"

"Living," the storekeeper answered gravely. "Just living."

"Yeah? That ain't what I'm askin', see? Ya can't tell me there ain't somethin' screwy about this burg. I been around. I know these mining camp's, and this ain't like none o' them! S'pose something went wrong, see? S'pose somebody burned somebody down—"

"Here? Why?"

"And I s'pose," Red Donovan sneered, "ya don't never need no cops, huh? Whaddaya do if somebody busts loose wide open?"

"Breaks the law, you mean? Oh, then—why, you see, we only have one law. And those who can't keep it just leave, one way or another."

"Oh, yeah? Some law!"

"Honor your neighbor," the paunchy storekeeper said quietly smiling. "That's all. Now, friend, I think these men have come to see you."

Red Donovan whipped about. Unconsciously his hand flashed to his hip.

Instantly he felt foolish. There seemed to be no menace in the calm faces of the first old men who filed through the door. One he recognized—the old prospector who had taken a dying stranger into his house.

"Friend," the prospector said, "the time has come to try you. These good men are the Elders of this town."

"So what?" Wary, suspicious, Donovan searched the faces of the five virile old men. "What's in the bag—some kinda kangaroo court?"

One of the Elders answered. Wise eyes under a massive forehead glanced fleetingly into Donovan's tense, set face.

"It may be, friend, you mistake our intent. We give you this chance to make an honest decision. Out there"—his extended palm seemed to indicate the wide desert, and all beyond—"there is continual strife and trouble. Here is peace. Do you want to leave, or will you be one of us?"

"I see. Askin' me to take a powder. Well—what's the catch if I decide to stay?"

"You will only be asked to keep our law."

Red Donovan laughed harshly. Nuts! Yeah, they sure were a hot delegation. Wanting him to join up with their mob! Well, that was okay. Leave? Not with that gold lying loose all over the place! No—when he pulled out he'd be dragging heavy!

"You know our law?" the prospector asked.

" 'Honor your neighbor'," Red Donovan quoted glibly.

"And you accept?"

"Sure! It's the berries. Ya got something there."

Hell, it wasn't even good fun to kid these loonies. It gave him the creeps someway. Oh, well—he could stand it just a little longer. Lay low. Play wise. Watch his chance, then lam! Who could stop him when he had the only gat in the whole damn dump?

"It will not be easy, Red Donovan," the old prospector solemnly warned. Donovan jumped—stared, wide-eyed at the smiling old man. "But if you want peace, friend, we shall help you to forget all that you are and have been."

"All what?" Red Donovan snapped with flaring terror.

"You remember what happened in Mojave?"

"I—say, what is this?" Donovan cried fiercely. "A gag? Well, if you know so much, whatdaya know? Spill it!"

His throat tightened with choking apprehension. They were so quiet — too damned quiet! Putting the finger on him! What was behind all this screwball business? Why didn't they fear him? Just let them try to start something! They'd learn tricks no gang of hayseeds ever knew—

"We do not judge you." The prospector spoke, smiling gravely. "In Mojave you held up a bank and you killed a man. You and your partner fled into the desert. You wrecked your car in an arroyo that you didn't see in time. You were pursued. You tried to walk all the way across Death Valley. Your partner died because you deserted him just before you found your way into our midst. You see, Red Donovan, there is no deed, here, to keep secrets."

"Third degree stuff, huh?" Donovan sneered. "Why don'tcha ask me to sign it?"

"Friend," the prospector said, "we mean you no harm." He laid a frail old hand on Red Donovan's quivering shoulder. And Donovan felt a vague stirring of mystery and a fear that had nothing in common with his dread of the law—fear of some unknown power that could be unleashed at a word; an unknown force with

the aspect of sympathy, therefore all the more to be distrusted. "You were lost when you found us. Confused. Here it does not matter at all what you did out there. Think of all that as though it was never real, only illusion."

"Yeah? Well, talk plain! None o' that hearts an' flowers stuff. What ya gettin' at?"

"A new beginning. A chance. Learn that it is better to live in friendship with fellow men."

"No strings? Ya won't turn me in to the bulls?"

"Forget that you were ever Red Donovan."

"I getcha—change my monicker and live here like nothin' happened."

"By your own free will, of course." The prospector smiled. "We do not compel you to keep our law. But you want to stay?"

"Oh, sure—I wanna stay, all right." Donovan grinned hypocritically, trying to match the smile in the clear eyes of the bearded townsmen. "Yeah—count me in!"

"Dwell in peace then, friend," the old prospector told him solemnly.

The Elders all shook hands with Red Donovan and, in turn, with each other. Red Donovan had never felt so goofy in his life. Him throwing the gam with these screwballs! Dopes! Next thing, maybe, they'd be asking him to give up the gat. But he'd say he chucked the rod in the lake. Give them a spiel—anyway, it wouldn't be much longer now.

Strange! There wasn't a wire running out of the place. Well, they could have a short wave set, maybe. He had a hunch no sheriff could get to the dump in less than two days. And before they could put over a fast one Red Donovan would be missing.

Baby—and how!

Just before sunrise Red Donovan stooped over the big water-hole and carefully filled a canteen. All the rest had been easy. The big front door of the store hadn't even been locked. The whole town slept. No one had heard him or seen him. Damn near too easy! The boys in 'Frisco wouldn't believe it. It was about all he could do, even now, to believe it himself.

The first shards of sunlight splintered on the highest peaks of distant mountains lifted above purple haze. How far? Maybe two days hard going. But he'd play wise. No burning his gizzard out this time under the blazing sun of Death Valley. Get gone out of sight, hole in, and do his heavy hoofing at night. That was the ticket. And if anyone of those bearded Mormons wanted to follow, he'd feed the buzzards.

High on his back Donovan carried a pack with a blanket, food and a fortune. Gold—heavy, crude nuggets and dull yellow dust! Say twenty-five thousand. Besides, twenty grand in bills were packed in neat layers under his shirt—all the swag he had taken out of Mojave.

Tough going, but it would be even worse than death to stick in a dead burg like Salvation Wells. Way outa the world—them that liked it could have it! Another two days and he would have gone nuts himself. What a laugh the boys in 'Frisco would have when he told them about them damned billy-goat Elders!

Two days to the mountains. In maybe a week after that, he'd be burning city lights. The heat would be on about that Mojave business, but even if he took a pinch he'd beat the rap. That would be easy fixed. Red Donovan, shooting high, riding the ball!

He'd got the breaks. Maybe, at that, there wasn't so much in the rough stuff. Maybe he'd think about crashing a neat little racket. A hot night-spot, say, with plenty of dames, and the boobs rolling up asking out loud for a cleaning.

A man's shadow fell across the still surface of the pool.

Red Donovan twisted about, fury contorting his face. The old prospector stood by his grizzled burro. The animal bore a pack with a light pick and shovel strapped to the load.

"*You!*" Donovan snarled.

"Leaving us, eh?" the old man asked quietly.

Donovan saw the shrewd, faded eyes glint as they fixed on the blanket containing the stolen gold.

"So what?" Donovan challenged, his lips a thin, ugly line. "I changed my mind, see?"

"I am afraid, friend, that you will find your burden heavy." The old man's tone was not hostile, but very gentle. "Even too heavy, Red Donovan. Are you quite sure that you want to go back?"

"Try and stop me—just try!"

"You forget. Our law would not permit me to limit your free will by force, even though I could easily—"

"You could, like hell!" Murderous fury, a creeping poison, heated Donovan's brain. "I'm sayin,' lug, this whole dump couldn't stop me! Yeah, and I gotta rod to say so! I'm fed up with this damned nut farm! Scram, screwball! I'm on my way, see?"

An idea—the burro would be useful! Slow, but with extra water there need not be any risk.

The prospector reached out a frail, brittle old hand to touch Red Donovan's sleeve. The pressure exerted no weight, but once again Donovan felt a creepy outflow of limitless power. Chill sweat dampened his forehead. Cursing wildly, he flung off the restraining hand.

"There can be no return."

The old man stood quietly looking at Donovan with shadowed, pitying eyes. He toppled over without a sound when Red Donovan's clenched fist crashed brutally against the bearded chin. The burro, shying, bolted away back toward the town.

"T'ell with that, then!" Donovan muttered.

Better get going before the whole damned town came yelping after him. With twenty yards start, he glanced back over his shoulder. The prospector lay still, loose as a tumbled bundle of empty clothes.

BEFORE the sun was an hour high, glistening sand crystals flung dazzling fire into the pulsing air. Donovan felt slightly dizzy.

Sweat bathed his body. The heavy pack chafed his back. Behind him the town, indistinct, warped oddly through the heat haze, growing more and more dreamlike and ghostly as the sun climbed the metallic sky.

Donovan plodded on. Now and then he glanced over his shoulder. Neither town nor oasis were there any more. Damn funny! He could see the black line of the distant arroyo where Pete Spinelli had fallen. And there was nothing between—no houses, no cottonwood trees, no water! Nothing—only colored sand glowing with heat and a few scattered greasewood bushes!

As far as he could see he was the one living thing on the face of the desert, the center of a vast circle utterly lonely.

At least the distant mountains were real! *They* had not changed! And Donovan walked toward the mountains. Yes, as long as the mountains stayed there he couldn't be lost—he'd know, anyway, where he was heading—

He didn't remember how or when he had lost his hat—before he saw the mirage, or afterwards.

Pain, like a steel clamp, tightened about his forehead. He had better rest, seek shadow, save strength for the night when pitiless sun stopped sucking moisture from his body. What a fool to keep going, like

a hunted man, when there was no one—nothing—to follow!

The pack was too heavy to lug any further. What if he buried it, marked by a pile of rocks? He could always come back to his little cache. Like that guy—yeah, Death Valley Scotty—the lug with a palace—never caught in a jam like this—

Crouched in the black shadow of a little wash, Donovan unscrewed the cap of the canteen dipped full from the water-hole at Salvation Wells. He raised the canteen to his lips—coughed, and spat. In his mouth there was only the bitter taste of dry alkali dust.

He hurled the dust-filled canteen aside. Soon then he began running. Back—the town wasn't—couldn't—be far! He had to find it! It was there—he'd been in it! That morning—not long ago!

There was water—there—at the edge of the town. Only he couldn't reach it. It was all dim and kept getting dimmer—the sleepy desert town, the calm pool, the burro, the old prospector standing there so quietly watching Red Donovan die—

"Let me in!" Donovan howled, the words stifled in his swollen, blistered throat. "Damn you—you devils—let—me—in—"

The wide plane of the desert and the deep bowl of the sky met and were sealed at the horizon. In all that empty world of shimmering crystal there was now no moving thing.

Presently, a tiny black speck began drifting lazily downward.

A hot wind from the mountains stirred the sand, set dust-devils to whirling, fantastic shapes like shifting smoke amid the crash of broken prisms of color. The sand whispered, a dry flinty sound like the scratching of dead twigs—

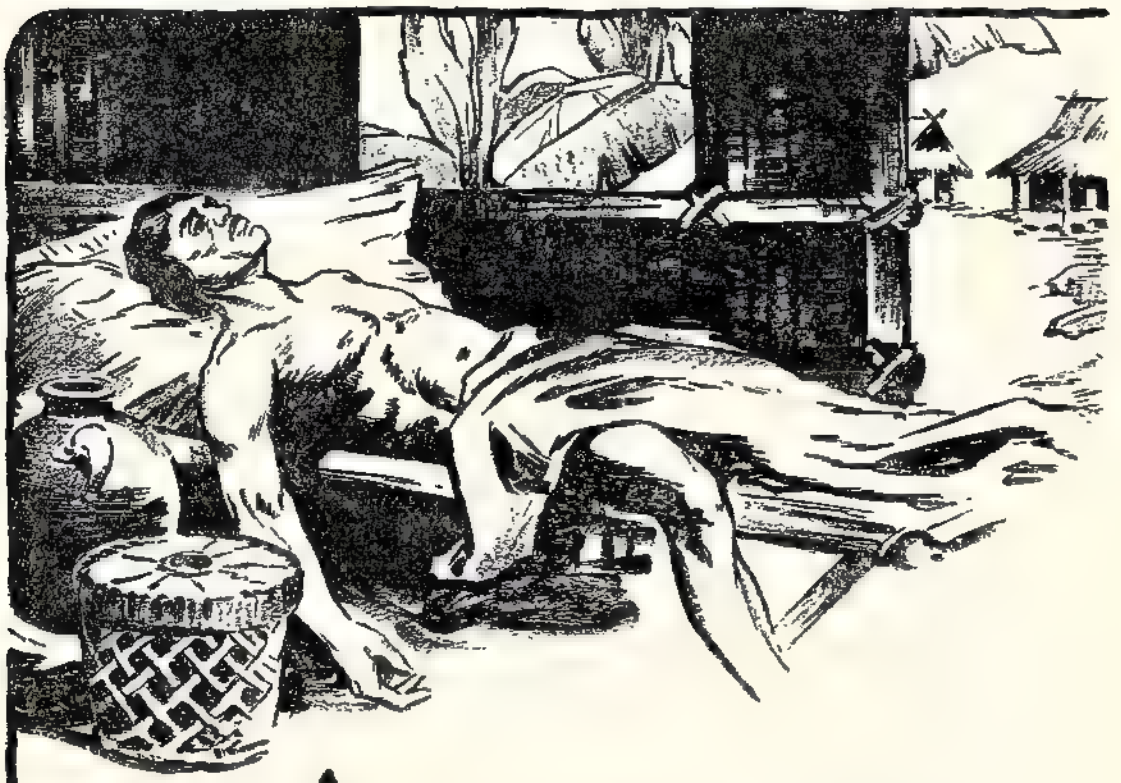
"I Talked with God"

(Yes I did—Actually and literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own control of the largest circulating newspaper in my County and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 321, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 321, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

SUPERSTITIONS



AMONG THE **KAYANS** OF BORNEO, THE CAUSE OF ILLNESS IS ATTRIBUTED TO THE ABSENCE OF THE SOUL. WHEN A MAN HAS BEEN SICK AND RECOVERS, HE ATTEMPTS TO PREVENT HIS SOUL FROM DEPARTING AGAIN BY FASTENING A STRING WITH AN ANTIQUE BEAD AROUND HIS WRIST. TO THIS BEAD IS ASCRIBED A MAGICAL VIRTUE, BUT LEST THIS STRING BE BROKEN AND LOST, HE WILL SOMETIMES TATTOO THE PATTERN OF THE BEAD ON HIS WRIST AND FIND THAT THIS ALSO WILL KEEP HIS SOUL WITHIN ITS CONFINES QUITE AS WELL...

AND TABOOS

by Hall

IF A MAN COMMENCING A JOURNEY SEES A FLOCK OF BIRDS FLYING TOWARD THE RIGHT, IT IS CONSIDERED A GOOD SIGN; IF TOWARD THE LEFT — A BAD SIGN...

LOOKING GLASSES AND PICTURES ARE COVERED AS LONG AS A CORPSE IS IN THE HOUSE — TO PREVENT THE SPIRIT FROM SEEING ITS REFLECTION. MIRRORS WERE ALWAYS CONSIDERED AS IMPLEMENTS OF DIVINATION, AND TO BREAK ONE WAS ACCOUNTED MOST DISASTROUS; FOR BY ITS DESTRUCTION THERE WAS NO MEANS OF KNOWING THE WILL OF THE GODS!

"The twin, actually only seven months old, was in appearance thirty-six."

Test Tube Twin

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Biology created—and then killed—a gangster's plan for the perfect murder.

LIKE a cowed and disheartened tiger in a cage, the slim broad-shouldered man in evening clothes plodded up and down the modernistically furnished windowless air-conditioned room. His cruel lips were set at a bitter slant.

Nearby, a bull-necked man in a blue serge suit sat watching him.

"But, boss," the bull-necked one remonstrated anxiously, "what's th' matter wid this dump as a hang-out?"

The tiger abruptly ceased his pacing, and snarled, "It's safe, yes. It's comfort-

able, yes. But I want freedom, Mike. And I don't intend to stay cooped up here all my life—cops or no cops!"

A buzzer sounded insistently. Both men jumped, and turned toward the door.

"It must be the doc, Mike," said the slim man, brightening. "And that means freedom for me! Let him in."

The big man lumbered to his feet, and slouched out of the room. The other resumed his pacing, but with a new feline litheness in his step.

A few minutes later Mike reappeared, shoving protestingly before him a small bespectacled man in a white laboratory coat.

"Sit down, Doctor," the slim man invited with a wave of his manicured hand toward one of the chromium-plated chairs. "Mike, you needn't stay. I'm quite sure that Doctor Tiverton is not dangerous!"

But the doctor did not take the proffered chair. He studied his host for a moment, then fell back a pace, with an expression of startled recognition. "So it's Tony Moroni the gangster, is it? Well, whatever dirty job you want of me, I'll not do it!"

"Sit—down!"

Startled, the little doctor sat.

"Now, doctor, tell me about your researches. Is it true that you plan to grow babies in test-tubes—asexually, by 'budding' as I believe you biologists call it?"

TIVERTON stiffened, and set his puny jaw belligerently. But the gangster's evident interest in Tiverton's beloved experiments proved too much for him. He relaxed. He leaned forward. His pale eyes glowed behind his thick-lensed glasses.

"Correct," he earnestly replied. "There are scattered throughout every human body millions of cells of 'undifferentiated tissue'—the same stuff which made up the original egg from which the man was born. When the egg developed into an embryo, certain hormones called 'organizers' caused most of the cells to differentiate into skin, nerve, brain, muscle, bone, and so forth; but some of the cells remained untouched by these organizers, and so continued as simple undifferentiated egg-cells."

"And you believe that it is possible to isolate one of these egg-cells, grow it in a test-tube, inject the proper organizers at the appropriate time and place, and thus develop it into a baby?"

"How do you know so much about my researches?" the little doctor countered.

Moroni smiled a twisted thin-lipped smile. "My scouts have been checking up on you, Doctor Tiverton. But answer my question!"

"Yes, we biologists believe that it is possible. And why not? Not all twins are caused by the fertilization of two ova; nor even by one ovum splitting into two parts. Sometimes there occurs what is called 'delayed twinning': that is to say, an undifferentiated cell takes it into its head—if I may use the phrase—to become a baby, and so it starts developing just as though it were the original ovum.

"One of the theories of cancer, Mr. Moroni, is that the cancer germ in some way stimulates a group of undifferentiated cells into an attempt to produce a delayed twin. That is why teeth and hair, for example, are often found in cancers."

Tony Moroni's eyes narrowed and he chuckled grimly. "So a cancer victim is killed by his own twin brother? Quaint idea! And do you think that, if properly financed, *you* could produce a twin brother for anyone?"

"Yes."

"An *identical* twin?"

"Yes. Every undifferentiated cell carries exactly the same hereditary characteristics as were carried by the original fertilized ovum. But of course the twin would be very much 'delayed.' For example, if

I made a twin of *you,* he would be just a baby, whereas you are a grown man."

"That's what I was afraid of—er—er—isn't there some way of speeding them up?" He tensed and glanced anxiously at Doctor Tiverton, but Tiverton was too carried away with his subject to notice anything other than scientific interest in the question.

"Yes, there *is* a way," he judiciously replied. "Do you remember reading in the papers a few years ago about that baby who died of senile debility at the age of three months?"

Moroni nodded.

The little doctor continued, "Well, that case interested me. So I experimented, and have already succeeded in isolating the hormone which causes growth. From my experiments with animals, I believe that I could bring a human baby to maturity in about six months; although, of course, he would be child-like mentally, having had no experience with life."

"That wouldn't matter—I mean, that's very interesting, Doctor Tiverton. I've always wanted to be a benefactor——"

"You?" Tiverton's pale eyes widened with surprise.

"Why not?"

"But why?" Tiverton stared at him suspiciously.

"Merely for *your* protection, Doctor. I don't want the public to accuse you of taking gangster money. I know that you have been turned down by the Rockefeller Institute and several other foundations. I am your last chance. Come, come, man! Can't your desire to serve humanity, overlook the source of the funds?"

Doctor Tiverton's pale eyes began to gleam again. "I—I—I think you're right, sir. Yes, I'll accept your generous offer. Very gladly, sir. I didn't mean to be rude, but you must realize——"

Moroni smiled wryly, and shrugged his broad shoulders. "No apologies necessary. I understand. Your professional standing would suffer if it became known that Public Enemy No. 1 were backing you. Well, as I have already stated, it suits me too to remain unknown. Okay, then. You will find ten grand deposited to your account in the State Street National Bank. Not a cent of it is to be spent for any purpose other than to equip a research laboratory—and to pay yourself a salary of five hundred a month. You are to render a monthly account, which I shall send for. From time to time I shall have you brought here to report in person. If you make satisfactory progress, more money will be made available, and your salary will be raised. But you are not to publish anything, nor even let it be known what is your line of research, until I give the word. Any help hired by you must meet with my approval. Is everything understood?"

"Yes. Yes, indeed! You are very generous. And, although your terms sound a bit peculiar, that is doubtless due to your —er—moving in different circles from me. I'll try to deserve your confidence."

Moroni twisted up his thin-lipped mouth and chuckled. He arose gracefully and pulled a bell-cord. Big Mike came rolling in.

"Send Doctor Tiverton home in my car," Moroni commanded. Then held out his hand. "Good-by, Doctor. You and I are going to be very useful to each other."

Mike, frowning and shaking his big head, led the little doctor from the room.

Tony Moroni resumed his pacing, but all suggestion of a caged tiger was now gone. His pacing was the testing stride of one about to be freed.

Mike returned, with a worried scowl on his heavy face. "I suppose you know what yer doin', boss. But won't th' doc tip off th' bulls to where yer hidin'?"

Moroni sniffed contemptuously. "Not he! Doctor Tiverton is so intensely interested in his experiments that he won't want

to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"So you admit yer a goose, boss? Well, th' quicker you lay an egg under th' doc an' blow him ter hell, th' better it'll suit me."

"All in good time, Mike. All in good time." He stretched his arms out to each side, and drew a deep breath of exultation.

A MONTH later Tony Moroni sent for Doctor Tiverton, and this time the doctor came willingly, without coercion or subterfuge, to the warehouse in the depths of which was located the gang-leader's windowless air-conditioned palatial apartment.

The two men met without tension, like business acquaintances of long standing.

"Well," asked Moroni, rubbing his sensitive hands together eagerly, "what progress?"

"I've succeeded in isolating some undifferentiated tissue, and causing it to multiply. But I haven't yet succeeded in producing the necessary organizers to cause it to differentiate. I need help."

"I rather expected the request. And I believe that I've thought up a way to grant it. How would you like to open another laboratory, with a dozen or so bright young assistants, devoted exclusively to cancer research?"

"Yes," eagerly. Then, puzzled, "But why *another* laboratory?"

Moroni's eyes narrowed slightly. "Because, my dear doctor, in that way these young men will never suspect that their search for the organizers which cause cancers is being conducted, not in hope of curing cancer, but rather to assist you in your private experiments in your own exclusive laboratory. Thus we shall eliminate the danger that one of your bright young men might steal the show. You see, I'm looking out for your interests."

"Yes—I see," doubtfully.

Moroni's keen eyes studied intently the face of his protégé. "Very well. Hop to it."

The periodic conferences continued. Four months later, the little doctor gleefully informed his patron that his assistants had succeeded in isolating most of the hormones of differentiation. By using these hormones, he had been able to cause a mass of undifferentiated tissue to develop into a human embryo in his own private laboratory.

Tony Morini chewed his cheek and studied his protégé. "It has actually become an embryo?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes."

"You have reason to believe that it will develop into a normal human child?"

"Yes."

"Then destroy it!"

The little doctor's pale eyes snapped with horror.

"But, Mr. Moroni!" he wailed, uncomprehending.

"Who is paying for these experiments?" Moroni sternly asked.

"You, sir, but——"

"Very well, then. Go back to your laboratory and get your 'tools', or whatever you call them. Bring them here and isolate some of *my* undifferentiated tissue. *Mine*, do you hear me? I want you to make a twin brother for *me*."

"Y-yes, sir. But the other embryo, the one which I have already started. Wouldn't it be well to continue that one, several steps ahead of this one, as a sort of guide—a pilot experiment, as it were?"

"No! Kill it, and start again. You can make several out of *my* tissue, and use some of *those* to experiment upon."

The little doctor clenched his hands in mental agony, then set his puny jaw and shook his head.

Moroni's eyes snapped, and his upper lip curled back off his teeth. "Suppose I withdraw my financial support?"

"Suppose I tell the police?"

"You'd never live to tell them."

"But *why* do you want me to kill it?"

"Man, don't you understand? It is I who am putting up all the money for this research; so don't you see that I want my own twin to be the first one ever created in this way? Can't you realize my pride in fatherhood, or brotherhood, or whatever?"

Doctor Tiverton smiled tolerantly, and nodded comprehendingly.

"Very well then," Moroni continued. "Go back and get your tools."

DOCTOR TIVERTON did not return quite as soon as Moroni had expected him to.

When big Mike finally brought the doctor in, his boss was pacing up and down as he had not done since the day when Doctor Tiverton was first brought to him.

"Well?" he snapped.

"They say th' doc asked 'em to drive him from his office to his home. He took a bag to get some clothes in."

"Of course I did," Doctor Tiverton hurriedly added. "I may be here several days, getting the samples. You intended that, didn't you, sir?"

"Oh, so that's it, eh? Well, don't pull anything like that again. From now on, you're going to be under guard. At your private laboratory, at the cancer research center, at your home, everywhere."

"I rather expected that, sir," said Tiverton mildly.

Moroni threw a swift glance at him, then shrugged his shoulders. "Well, get going. Perhaps, if you hurry, you won't have to spend the night here after all."

"Of course, sir, if you object to my staying here, I can keep on coming back and taking samples, until I get results."

"That would be much better."

Using a local anesthetic, Doctor Tiverton took several small bits of flesh from those accessible portions of the anatomy of the sardonic gang-leader where cancer most frequently develops. These samples he placed in culture-media in thermos bottles. Then, under the personal guardianship of big Mike, he departed for his private laboratory.

Later Mike returned alone.

"Well?" Moroni anxiously inquired.

"I don't know what it's all about, boss," Mike replied, "but I did like you said. There was somethin' what looked like a pollywog growin' in a bottle. Th' doc said it was a baby. He poured acid on it—an' pouf!"

Moroni relaxed his tenseness, and smiled a tight-lipped, twisted smile. "Now *mine* will be the first and only one!" he exulted.

"Say, boss, you ain't thinkin' of havin' a kid, are you?"

"Mike, you'd be surprised."

DOCTOR TIVERTON made several trips to Tony Moroni's secret hangout, before he reported that he had succeeded in isolating a group of undifferentiated cells from the samples of flesh taken from his patron.

Meanwhile several of the gang-leader's henchmen were given janitor jobs in Tiverton's private laboratory and in his cancer research center. while other gorillas shadowed the doctor everywhere he went.

Finally Doctor Tiverton reported to Moroni that several embryos had started to grow. The healthiest one was picked for the final product, and the others were used to try injections on, before applying the injections to the chosen individual. One by one these test babies died. Like an American Beauty rose, nourished by the clipping of all the other buds on the stem, the selected embryo developed and grew in its tube of culture-medium.

Tony Moroni became frantically eager to see it. He sent for Doctor Tiverton almost daily for reports, had him take many photographs showing its progress, begged

him to bring it over to the hangout. But the little doctor insisted that the risk was too great.

"In fact," said Doctor Tiverton, "I'd like to hire a competent nurse right now, without waiting for the baby to be born. Then the fetus can be under constant care and attention, even when I'm at home asleep."

"I know just the one for you," said Moroni.

He sent for a girl named Rose, who had been a trained nurse, and later the moll of Bill Dolan, Moroni's trusted lieutenant. Dolan was still Moroni's lieutenant, but no longer quite so trusted. And Rose had been thrown over by Dolan, which fact rendered her more than willing to make a play for the big boss himself, if for no other reason than to show Bill Dolan that he had kicked her upstairs rather than down.

"Rose," said Moroni, "I have a job for you, a long hard job, a year perhaps. When it's over, you and I are going away—together. Meanwhile I'll see that the boys all know that you're Tony Moroni's girl. Will you do this for me?" He drew his thin twisted mouth up into a smirk.

"Will I? Say, Tony, you know I've always——"

"Save that for later!" he snapped, holding up his hand protestingly. "You're not my girl yet, though the boys will all be told so. Not until I've tested your loyalty for a year. And you're not to breathe a word of all this to Bill Dolan."

"That so-and-so!" she spat. "Say, Tony, if the info means anything to Bill Dolan, that's reason enough for me buttoning up my lips."

NINE months elapsed. Moroni was as nervous as an expectant father at a maternity hospital. And when Doctor Tiverton at last telephoned him that the baby had been taken from its test-tube and had successfully drawn its first breath of life—his words had been: "Mr. Moroni, I congratulate you on becoming the brother of a seven-pound baby boy"—the gangster had gone to bed and required medical attention himself.

He was even tempted to leave the safe seclusion of his hideout and go to see the child, but he restrained himself. Instead he had Doctor Tiverton come and report in person, leaving the new-born baby in its nurse's care.

"Doctor Tiverton," he exulted, "we two have made a great contribution to the unwritten history of America. Next I want you to mature that baby just as quick as the Lord will let you. You still think you can do it?"

The little doctor's pale eyes glowed pridefully. "I'm *sure* that I can."

"How long will it take to bring him to my own age?"

Doctor Tiverton studied his patron's appearance appraisingly. "About seven months, I should estimate."

"Good! Good! Doc, you don't know what this means to me—to have a twin brother my own age and looks. Why, it'll be the making of me! Doc, you can rest assured that I shan't forget you, when you finally accomplish what I'm after!"

"Of course," Tiverton diffidently explained, "you understand, Mr. Moroni, that although your brother's mind will be the equal of yours, it will be wholly untrained, with only the experience of a young child."

"Yes, yes," impatiently. "I understand."

"But, sir," reassuringly, "he should catch up with you very quickly from then on."

"I wonder." Moroni smiled a thin-lipped, introspective smile. "Well, run along, Doc. And Heaven help you if anything happens to my brother before he reaches the age of thirty-six!"

In Doctor Tiverton's private laboratory, under the constant care of Tiverton and the nurse Rose, Moroni's twin baby brother matured by leaps and bounds. Weekly photographs were taken and submitted to Moroni, and the gang-leader's exultation grew as the baby progressed through childhood to boyhood, young manhood.

As he studied each successive picture, the gang-leader would chuckle, "Yes. Yes. That's just how I looked at that age. Ain't science wonderful, Doc!"

Six months after the "birth" of the test-tube baby, it was the exact replica of Tony Moroni at the age of thirty. Moroni shut himself up more completely than ever, and refused to see anyone except big Mike, Doctor Tiverton, and the nurse Rose.

And he started to grow a beard.

As he laughingly explained to Mike, "My brother is getting to look so much like me, that I've *got* to have some way of telling us apart. Hence the beard."

Mike stared at him for a moment. Suddenly comprehension and admiration dawned upon his broad features.

"I getcha, Chief!" he exclaimed. "Yer goin' ter bump off yer brother, an' then make a getaway." His face fell. "But how about yer fingerprints? That is unless yer twin has th' same prints as yerself."

Moroni laughed. "Mike, you amaze me with your erudition. No, the poor boy's fingerprints are *not* like mine. No two men in this world have identical fingerprints, not even in the case of identical twins. Mike, you have always been very clever at carrying out my orders, even though you are sometimes a bit slow in thinking for yourself. Here is a list of the places where my fingerprints are on file, and the dates when each was printed. From each place I want you to get me a blank fingerprint card of the kind which was in use on that date, and also *borrow* my record card. The sky is the limit. Now hop to it!"

"I getcha, Chief," big Mike grinned.

So all the record cards of Tony Moroni were supplanted by cards just the same in every respect except that they bore the fingerprints of Moroni's laboratory-bred twin brother.

By the time that this interchange had been completed, the twin, actually only seven months old, was in appearance thirty-six, like the brother from whose flesh he had sprung.

Then one night, when Doctor Tiverton was home in bed, Rose and her patient were brought to the air-conditioned hide-out in the secret depths of the warehouse.

The synthetic twin was trimly clad in a suit of Tony Moroni's best, which he wore with the same easy swagger as his gangster brother. He had the same broad shoulders, the same slim hips, the same keen eyes and twisted mouth. In fact, except for an almost unnoticeable immaturity of expression, he *was* Tony Moroni.

THE real Moroni's face was pale beneath his new-grown beard, as Rose introduced them.

"Bobby," she said, "this is the kind Mr. Moroni, who gives us all our nice things.—I call him Bobby, Tony. Had to give him a name, you know.—Bobby, shake hands with the nice man.—Gosh, Tony! I hardly knew you with those whiskers."

The twin obediently held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, sir," he said. His voice had the deep pitch of a man's, so remarkably similar to Moroni's own voice that the gangster winced. But the intonation was that of a young child.

Moroni was quivering as with a chill, as he took hold of the outstretched hand. His own hands were encased in white cotton gloves.

"They never told me he could talk!" he exclaimed. "Nor that he had a name! So this is Bobby. Robert Moroni, my own twin brother!"

He shuddered, and passed the back of one white-gloved hand across his eyes with a tired gesture. Then he straightened his shoulders, and set his crooked jaw defiantly. Big Mike looked worried. Moroni nodded to him reassuringly.

"Come, Bobby. Come into this next room with me. I want to show you something."

"Gosh, Tony," cried Rose, comprehending, "whatcher going to do to the——"

Mike clapped a big hand across her mouth, and firmly held her. But Bobby never noticed. He was trustingly and admiringly following his older brother. And if he had noticed, he would not have understood.

The door closed behind him and Moroni. A muffled shot was heard. Rose shrieked, in spite of Mike's restraining hand, and struggled violently in his bear-like arms.

When Moroni returned again through the door, his face was set and grim, and his usually inscrutable eyes were brimming. In each white-gloved hand he held a gun.

"And now, damn you, Rose," he snarled, "*you're* going to answer for my brother's death!"

The girl's eyes widened, and her face went white, as she struggled in the powerful arms of big Mike.

"Me?" she shrieked. "Good God, Tony——"

"Oh, I know it's not your fault. But you used to be Bill Dolan's moll, and I hate him. If he hadn't doublecrossed me, I'd not have had to cower here in this hideout all these months, afraid of the police. And you were Dolan's moll at the time when he doublecrossed me. You see this gun, Rose? It's Dolan's. It has his fingerprints on it. A bullet from it has just killed my brother—who everyone will think is me. The gun will be planted back on Dolan again!"

He raised the other gun, and Rose's eyes went even wider. She cowered back against big Mike.

"Tony, Tony!" she cried. "I'm your girl! Do you hear me? I left Bill Dolan for you! I love you, I swear it! Tony, you can't do this to me!"

But Moroni's face remained grim.

"This other gun is mine. It has no prints on it," he said.

"Tony!"

The roar of the weapon cut short her agonized appeal. With a gurgling shriek, Rose collapsed in Mike's arms.

"Drop her right there, Mike," Moroni commanded unconcernedly, "before you get blood all over you. I'm going to put this gun into the right hand of myself, lying dead on the floor of the next room."

A momentary shudder passed through his slim, perfectly tailored form as he mentioned the dead body in the next room.

Mike shrugged his broad shoulders. "But I don't see——" he began.

"Very simple," Moroni explained, with a contemptuous glance at the crumpled body of the girl who had loved him. "Here's how the bulls will figure it out. Bill Dolan came here to find Rose. We had a quarrel over the girl. I killed her—probably accidentally, while gunning for Dolan. And Dolan chased me into the next room, and shot me down. So the police will cross Public Enemy No. 1 off their list as gone the way of all bad gangsters."

He paused, and his crooked slit mouth contorted into a broad grin.

"And listen to the best part of it, Mike," he chuckled. "Bill Dolan, the mug who doublecrossed me, will get the hot seat for my murder; which is a murder which he would like to have pulled, so that makes it perfectly fair to pin it onto him. Oh, and just before leaving town I'll phone the police an anonymous tip to take a look in the warehouse."

"But how about th' doc? Won't he squeal?"

"Mike, you took the words out of my mouth. Send two of the boys to the doc's residence, to invite him here to an important conference. And they mustn't slip. He probably will come without suspecting anything. But he must be brought here at all costs. Get that? And while the boys are bringing the doc, you plant this gun back on Bill Dolan. Now scram!"

He wrapped the Dolan gun in a handkerchief and handed it over to his big bodyguard. Then he turned, slumped a bit, and carried the other gun in through the doorway of the adjoining room.

ABOUT an hour later Mike returned and reported the successful planting of the Dolan gun.

Just then the buzzer rang. Mike went to answer it.

In a few minutes he came lumbering excitedly back with a worried look on his usually bland face.

"Say, Chief, this is bad!" he panted. "Th' boys have bumped off th' doc."

"What!" exclaimed Moroni.

"They *had* to, Chief! Honest they did. He wouldn't come with 'em, so they grabbed him, an' gagged him, an' drug him along. He fought, an' kicked, an' bit. They kep' tellin' him they'd bump him off if he didn't shut his trap, but they say he was too scared ter listen ter reason. An' finally in th' car he broke loose from his gag an' let out a yell; so they let him have it."

"Where's the body?"

"Downstairs in th' car."

Moroni relaxed, and laughed a laugh of relief. "Why, that's perfectly all right, Mike. It has merely saved me the trouble of doing it myself. And I rather liked the doc. I killed one man tonight, whom I had rather let live. Two—er—one is enough in one night—not that I mind bumping off that she-rat," he added hastily.

"Well," he continued, "you bring up the body. I want to take a good look at it, so that I shan't be depending on anyone else's say-so that Doctor Tiverton is dead. Then there'll be no one else in the world who knows the story of the test-tube baby, except you and me.

"Oh, and find out which of the boys shot the doc, and bring me his gun. I'll take it with me and drop it in the river tonight.

"That'll make one unsolved mystery for the police to worry about, with no gun for the ballistic experts to match with the death bullet." He chuckled grimly.

Mike hurried out, and presently returned with a slumped figure over one shoulder, and a gun in the other hand. Moroni pocketed the gun, and then carefully examined the small frail body.

"It's the doc, all right," he said, chuckling grimly. "Face looks kind of peaceful in death. Good material for a first-rate undertaker's job, if it weren't for the fact that he'll probably lie for a long time before he's found. For I want you to take him to his own private laboratory, Mike, and leave him there. By the time he's found, his body'll be in such bad shape that no one'll ever figure out he wasn't killed right there. All right, Mike, take him away. And when you come back, tell the boys not to wait."

AFTER Mike had departed, toting his grisly burden, Moroni brought out two heavy suitcases, and set them down beside the elevator-well. On them he laid a hat and coat. He grinned a slitted twisted grin through his new-grown beard.

"All set for the getaway," he gloated. "The perfect crime. Now no one knows about my double, except Mike and me. Poor Mike! He thinks that he is going with me."

With white-gloved hand he took out the revolver which had killed the doctor. One cartridge had been discharged. Moroni slipped the gun back into his pocket, and shook his head.

"No," he ruminated. "I can't use this one. I'll have to use my own gat, and throw that away too. It would never do for the police to find similar bullets in Mike's dead body here and in the doc's dead body over in his laboratory. I don't want the doc's death pinned onto my gang."

He reached beneath his left armpit, pulled out his own trim automatic and fingered it lovingly.

"The perfect crime!" he repeated.

The elevator clicked and began to approach. Moroni raised his gun with narrowed eyes.

The door of the elevator opened, and Mike stumbled out, his fat face white with fear, his arms hanging in front of him.

Moroni fired, but just as he pulled the trigger, he noticed that Mike's wrists were handcuffed; and with quick appreciation of what this meant, he jerked the weapon aside, and missed.

Mike tripped and pitched forward, pushed by someone behind him. And out of the elevator barged five policemen with drawn automatics.

Moroni hesitated a moment, dropped his weapon to the floor, and raised his own hands aloft, then chuckled softly to himself at the humor of the situation.

For not an article in either of the suitcases was identifiable as having belonged to the notorious Tony Moroni, now deceased; in fact they were all marked with the name "John Anderson" or the initials "J. A." All of his money was safely planted in various banks under that name. All recorded fingerprints of Tony Moroni would check with those of the deceased.

The bearded living "John Anderson" could testify that he had just returned to his apartment, and had found the bodies; hence his being jittery and too quick on the trigger when the elevator door opened. He had known the dead Tony Moroni, but not intimately. The girl, no. Bill Dolan, no. Mike, he had seen occasionally in company with Mr. Moroni, that was all.

Mike himself, not knowing that Tony had meant to shoot him, would not intentionally give his chief away—would corroborate his story. So that the worst that could happen would be a charge, impossible to prove, that John Anderson had been "harboring" Tony Moroni.

Grinning, he held out his wrists, and the manacles were snapped onto them.

Just then there peered out of the elevator the timid face of Doctor Tiverton, with its thick-lensed spectacles and pale blue eyes.

As these eyes focused on the bearded prisoner, their timidity vanished, and the little doctor dashed wildly out into the room.

"That's him! That's Tony Moroni!" he cried, pointing at the horrified gangster. "He's the man who sent his thugs to my house to kidnap my twin brother. He killed my twin brother!"

"*Your* twin brother!" Moroni exclaimed involuntarily, uncomprehending.

"Yes, *mine,* the embroys which you commanded me to kill, before I made yours for you. Well, I didn't kill it then. You did, just now!"

Moroni went limp. A policeman, patting Moroni's pockets, pulled out a revolver.

"One cartridge fired," the cop announced. "Perhaps this is the gun that killed Doctor Tiverton's brother.

It was. The perfect crime had crumbled.

Honeymoon in Bedlam

By NELSON S. BOND

Gigantic webs of doom—miles in extent, hundreds of feet deep

I REMEMBER the preacher saying, "I now pronounce you man and wife—," and I remember the sweet smile on Lorraine Bowman's face and the dazed smirk on Johnny Larkin's, and the clank of sabers as we walked up the aisle through an arch of gleaming steel. I remember asking to kiss the bride. Then I remember something about a banquet, with somebody passing out drinks, and I remember demanding to kiss the bride again.

Then there was another bottle or three, and it must have been powerful juice because I remember Johnny Larkin frowning when I insisted on kissing the bride. Then I felt sorry for myself and started to cry, and Captain Bowman roared something about, "Take that boiled son-of-a-spacehawk home and pour him into bed," and I looked around, wondering who was tanked, and by golly, they all were but me! Which I tried to explain, standing on a table so I could get their attention, but somebody pulled the table out from under me.

And that's all I remember until I woke up the next morning with my mouth tasting like the inside of a birdcage, and Lt. Sam Evans, Second Mate of the *Pegasus,* was standing at my bedside grinning at me. Sunbeams were bouncing up and down on my counterpane like elephants. I moaned and said, "Get 'em out of here, Sam!"

He said, "Them? Who?"

"Those little purple men. They're making faces at me."

He said, "Shoo! Go away, little purple men!" and they disappeared. "You," he said, "sure collected yourself a snootful last night."

"Who?" I demanded, holding the top of my head on. "Me? I don't know what you're talking about. Can I help it if I was suddenly taken sick?"

"You were suddenly taken," he chortled, "drunk! I thought I'd die when you picked Cap Bowman up piggy-back and started sliding down banisters with him. You said you were a space vacuole looking for some place to happen. And when you told the crowd about the time you swiped the skipper's winter drawers and ran 'em up the flagpole—"

"Did I," I shuddered, "tell them that?"

"You sure did. You also had a lot to say about some girl at Mars Central spaceport. You said you called her 'Ginger,' because she was a snap—"

"Go 'way!" I moaned. "Go 'way and let me explode in peace."

Evans grinned. "No can do, Sparks. Bowman sent me down to bet you. All brevetmen are to report to the control turret immediately. So grab some breakfast, and—"

"Don't!" I howled.

BUT I had some breakfast while I dressed; an aspirin, a cup of coffee, and two more aspirins. And I finally reached the control-turret of our space-going scow, there to find my shipmates standing around looking very what-the-hell? The skipper scowled at me as I wobbled in.

"I can't help thinking of the poor devils who died there. Like human flies in a monstrous viscous web."

"Well! So you made it? Darby, there's limits to everything, and you exceeded 'em last night—"

"Look, Skipper," I said, "I can explain everything. It was this way—"

"Best man!" he snorted. "If you was the best man at that weddin', I'm a grampus' tonsils. You was a disgrace to yourself, the *Pegasus*, an' mankind in general—Ah! The top of the mornin' to you, son."

Enter the bridegroom, Johnny Larkin, preceded by a sheepish grin. He said, "Good morning, folks. Lovely day, isn't

it?" Then, to the Old Man, curiously, "I thought they were Earthdocking us for three weeks, Skipper? Why the conference?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I got a call from G. H. Q. first thing this mornin'. All leaves to be cancelled, they said. We're to have a visitor in a few—There! That must be him now."

It was. Colonel Ira Brophy, one of the igbay otshays of the IPS, the corporation that pays us our monthly insufficient. He bustled in all grins, grunts and glamor, pump-handled the skipper and beamed on us like an overgrown sunbeam.

"A fine looking body of men, Captain Bowman! Yup, yup! And believe me, sir, the IPS is justly proud of this ship and its officers. Yup!"

At my side, Johnny Larkin muttered something that sounded like "—donae ferentes—" But Captain Bowman fell for it, hook, line and sinker. He said, "Thank you, Colonel. And we, in turn, are proud to be privileged to do our little part for the Corporation. Any thing, any time—that's the way we feel about it—"

Brophy pounced gleefully.

"Wonderful, Captain! Marvelous! Yup, yup, yup! I told my associates that would be your attitude. 'The men of the *Pegasus,*' I told them, 'will be delighted to undertake this mission. Even though it may mean the curtailment of a certain amount of personal liberty and pleasure—'"

Bowman's chin hit his wishbone. A pint-sized Aurora Borealis played over his gills. "M-mission?" he gargled.

"Yes, Captain. It is my pleasure to inform you that to the *Pegasus* has been allotted the honor of investigating our recent cosmic visitor, Caltech VI. Yup, yup!

"You will be equipped with motion-picture, meteorological and analytical devices, and will lift gravs at 19.03 Solar Constant Time tomorrow. I need not assure you that with you go the best wishes of our great organization—"

I didn't hear the rest. I was too busy stifling an impulse to wham Brophy over the conk with a blunt instrument. I glimpsed the pans of Larkin, Evans, Weir, and the rest of the boys, and knew I wasn't alone in my reaction.

This was a hellbuster of an assignment! Caltecht VI was the latest addition to Sol's family, a space-wandering planet that, from God-knows-where, had recently swum within the gravitational attraction of our sun—and taken up residence between Mars and the asteroids.

From the beginning it had been a trouble-maker. I needn't tell even the ground-grippingest Earthlubber of you that the solar system is weighed on such a hair-trigger balance that any considerable outside influence will throw it haywire. Caltech VI—named after the old, 200-inch platter that had spotted it—had raised a terrific rumpus settling into an orbit. It had caused howling storms on Mars, ionic disturbances on mighty Jupiter, and blasted a half hundred planetoids clear out of existence.

Astronomers agreed the newcomer could not last very long. A couple thousand years at the most. Inevitably it would be torn to pieces by the titanic tug-o'-war eternally waged by Jupiter and the Sun. But in the meantime, according to the Fraunhofer analysis, there were valuable ores on the interloper. Somebody, the first person or group, who set claim-stakes on Caltech's soil, would clean up big.

Fine, hush? Swell! I should have been joyful at the prospect of dipping into this celestial gravy, eh? But maybe I forgot to mention that already three expeditions had gone out from Earth and one from Venus. All of them had reported successful landings on the planet, then—silence!

Cap Bowman had gathered up his scat-

tered wits, now, and began volleying protests like a skeet-chucker.

"But, Colonel!" he howled, "The *Pegasus* isn't good enough for that sort of job. We're a freighter! Our plates are worn, our hypatomics old-fashioned—"

"Yup," said Brophy agreeably. "We know. But your space record is enviable. You have served the Corporation faithfully and well—"

What he meant was, we could be spared. Johnny Larkin said wryly, "I should think those would be arguments for *not* sending the *Pegasus.*"

Brophy glowered at him from behind glinting pince-nez. "And who might this be?"

The skipper said nervously, "Lt. Larkin, sir. My First Mate." He added proudly, "Him an' my daughter had a military weddin' last night."

"That's too bad, Captain," harumphed Brophy. "But to return to the subject—"

"Military!" bellowed the skipper. "Not 'shotgun!'" Then a sudden idea struck him; he adopted a wheedling tone. "Look Colonel—if we gotta go, we gotta go. But I c'n excuse Lt. Larkin from duty, can't I? After all, he's on his furlough. This is his honeymoon—"

Brophy shook his head decisively.

"I'm sorry, Captain. All furloughs are cancelled. All men must report for duty on this special assignment. I might add, though, that if your venture is successful, the Corporation will fittingly reward all participants—"

"An' if it ain't?" asked the Old Man.

"They'll bury us," I piped up, "by remote control. With honors. See you later, boys. I've got to see a carpenter about a coffin." And I left.

SO THAT was that. You don't argue with the I. P. S. The next day found the *Pegasus* loaded to the gunwales with all sorts of equipment. Cameras, spectroscopes, inferometers, gadgets and junk, the very names of most of which were just so much Sanskrit to me. That's where Johnny Larkin came in. He was not only our First Mate; he was our technological expert.

But the Corporation also had the almighty viscera to fill one freight hold with cargo! "Concentrate of zymase," said the lading superintendent. "For deposit at Mars Central on the return trip. Get a receipt from the Medical Officer, Captain."

"What's his name?" demanded the skipper gloomily. "Saint Peter? Oh, hello, son. Sorry I couldn't get you out of this mess. Where's Lorraine?"

"That's all right," said Larkin. "Maybe everything will be all right. She's home. She wanted to come along but I wouldn't let her. Space is no place for a woman."

Bowman growled, "This is a hell of a honeymoon for you, boy! An' for her, too. Well, we might as well lift gravs. Sparks, get clearance from the port."

I said, "Aye, sir!" and did. At 19.03 on the nose we blasted hell-for-Thursday out of Long Island Port, for'rd tubes pointed at a mysterious new dot in the heavens that had already killed more men than a Central American rebellion.

That was at 19.03. At 22.00 sharp, Slops boomed the gong for the late watch mess. And at 22.07, the door of the mess hall opened and in walked—Lorraine Larkin, *nee* Bowman!

CAP BOWMAN had a mouthful of tomato juice when he laid eyes on her. Two seconds later, his mouth was open in a roar and the tablecloth had a mouthful of tomato juice.

"Lorraine! What in the name of the seven sacred satellites are *you* doing aboard? Don't you know—?"

"Now, Daddy!" She smiled, and my heart did tricks. You've never been

smiled at till you've been out in front of one of those extra-special de luxe Lorraine Larkin jobs. She was sugar and spice and everything nice, and don't some guys have all the luck? "Now, Daddy, remember your blood pressure."

"Blood pressure be damned!" frothed Bowman. "You git right off'n this barge an' go back to Earth where you belong!"

"It's cold out there," said Lorraine. "Remember? And besides, this *is* where I belong—isn't it, honey?"

She looked at Johnny Larkin, who was suddenly having trouble with his epi-brothers, dermis and glottis. The first was scarlet, the second was charging up and down in his throat like a berserk elevator. He managed to get a few words out.

"You," he gulped, "shouldn't be here!"

"And where else would a girl be," demanded Lorraine coolly, "than at her husband's side? Especially on her honeymoon?" She plumped herself down beside him. "Bring one more plate, Slops. There's company for dinner."

The skipper rose.

"Enough," he declared, "is too much. I wasn't hot on this trip from the start. Now I'm an Eskimo. Sparks, take a message to Long Island Spaceport. Tell 'em—"

"Tell them," interrupted Lorraine Larkin, "that the captain and crew of the *Pegasus* are on their way to find out what happened to those other poor fellows who tried to land on Caltech VI. And tell them we *will* find out, because we're the toughest, smartest, space-lickingest gang of etherhounds who ever lifted gravs. And there's nothing between here and Procyon that can scare us. Mmmm! What delicious soup—"

That stopped them. That stopped them cold. Bowman looked thoughtful, one gnarled hand caressed his jowls. Larkin stopped trying to talk, a curious look came into his eyes. Tom Anderson's shoulders stiffened; old MacPhee, the Chief Engineer, dragged out a filthy, oil-smeared handkerchief, blew his nose viciously and said, "Grrrumph!"

Me, I was stunned speechless, too. Oh, not because she had reminded me we had a moral obligation to find out what had happened to the previous explorers. It wasn't that she'd roused in me any latent spark of pride in the *Pegasus*, either. What got me was her calling the soup 'delicious'! Good golly, that stuff? Delicious?

SO WE went on, and Lorraine Larkin went with us. I don't have to tell you about the trip; you can get that from the log book. It was sixteen days to the Mars ecliptic, but Mars wasn't there, of course.

It was sky-hooting along four weeks to sta-board. Little things happened, none important. The outstanding thing about the trip was the dopey way our one time sane and sensible first mate, Johnny Larkin, was behaving.

He had apparently reconciled himself to the idea of Lorraine's being with us. Reconciled? Whoops! He was closer to his bride than twelve o'clock sharp. Everywhere you saw Lorraine, there was Johnny, and vice versa.

Then we hit the highroad between Mars and the asteroids, the great open spaces in which Caltech had taken squatters' rights. Bob Weir punched keys on the astrocalculator and figured it would take us a week and a half to reach our destination. I wasn't sure I could last that long.

For why? One guess. Lt. and Mrs. J. Larkin. Their billing and cooing was enough to make a Martian canal-pussie blush green. Every time you saw Johnny he was playing octupus with Lorraine's hand. He had dawn and soft breezes in his eyes when he looked at her, and the

glances she heaved back weren't exactly typhoons at midnight.

The worst part is, they didn't seem to have a bit of shame! They didn't care whether anybody saw them acting like melted cheese sandwiches or not. And oh! what they said! He called her "Lovums"; she called him "Cutsie," which was all wrong, "Bugsie," which was one hundred per cent right, and a lot of other names too nauseating to mention.

But somehow we survived. And finally came the time when the skipper came busting into my turret and bawled, "Git y'r feet off'n the desk, Sparks. Take a message to—"

"I know," I told him. "I already sent it. To Joe Marlowe at Lunar III. Caltech VI is oh-oh under the nose. The *Pegasus* is preparing to land, and the situation is—"

"Ain't you the smart little numbskull?" snorted the skipper. "Remind me to use your brain for mattress stuffin'. No, dimwit, we ain't landin'. I ain't goin' to set down on this here outlaw planet till I learn what I'm landin' on. The *Pegasus* ain't goin' to be number four on the missin' list." He beamed complacently. "Me, I'm smart, I am."

WELL, so is sunburn. But who loves it. Anyway, I said, "Well, if we're not going to land on Caltech, what's that big thing looming in the visiplate? Green cheese?"

Bowman took one squint through the perilens and let loose a howl that frightened its own echoes. "He's landin'! The damn fool's settin' us down!"

He made a dive for the door. I grabbed his flying coat-tails long enough to squawk, "Who?" and the answer came Dopplering back, "Larkin! The space-crazy idiot!"

I moved, too. Sheer suction pulled me along as we hit the ramp, charged through the corridors, scrambled up the Jacob's-ladder and bore down on the control room. At the door I managed to pant, "Who—who's in there with him?"

"Who do you think?"

"That's what I thought. What is this? A spaceship or a mushroom?"

Then we were inside, and it was just like I thought it would be. Larkin was seated in the pilot's chair, pushing the buttons that eased the *Pegasus* to terra firma, and hovering over him like a halo around a saint's occipital was his ever-loving bride.

Bowman screamed, "Larkin! Wait!" and Lorraine turned, smiling.

"Isn't he clever, Daddy? He's the best pilot in the whole, wide universe—aren't you, peachie?"

"Now, sweet—" protested Johnny modestly.

"Wait!" squalled the skipper. "Wait!"

"Weight, sir?" said Johnny, lifting out of his daze for a moment. "Aye, sir. If you think best—" And he punched the grav plugs. My knees buckled suddenly as the plates took hold. Bowman stumbled; Lorraine gasped. Over the intercommunicating audio came voices, a dozen irate queries from various parts of the ship. Bowman spoke with an effort.

"Not *weight,* you double-blasted lunatic! *Wait!* Till we see what we're gettin' into—"

But he spoke too late. The grip of the grav plates had done it. Our nose jets spluttered, the ship lurched and slithered, there came a sharp bump, surprisingly yielding and bouncy considering the speed at which we had grounded, and—here we were. On Caltech. Motionless, after weeks of travel.

No, not motionless! For then I felt it. Bowman and Larkin felt it. A squidgy sort of sinking sensation, a sort of wobbling insecurity, as though the ground were opening to let us drop through. The skipper, an incredible mauve color, roared,

"Lift 'er up, Johnny! We're gettin' into something!"

Larkin made desperate passes at the control board. The rockets flared and hissed, turning the control room into a bedlam. But nothing happened. I saw why. I yelled,

"We ain't getting—we've got! Look!"

They all stared, like me, at the quartzite forward panes. Blue sky should have been visible through them, warm sunlight should have been flooding the turret. The terrain of Caltech should have stretched before our gaze. But guess again. All we could see was a gooey splatter of *stuff* oozing up the sides of the *Pegasus*. A strange, viscous, colorless matter that surged up and about our ship with weird, tentacular writhings. It covered the entire pane, gulped and burbled sloppily as it engulfed the top of the ship. We continued to experience that sinking feeling—

"Sweet whispering stars!" gasped the skipper. "Am I off my gravs? Do you see what I see? The ground melted an' come up an' et us!"

And I knew, suddenly, what had heppened to those who had landed before us on mysterious Caltech. Like us they had been swallowed beneath the soggy, flypaper crust of the alien planet.

WELL, everything happened at once, then. I guess I'm just a bug-pounder at heart, after all. My first thought was composed of dots and sashes. I made a bee-line for the radio room, powered the tubes and began CQ-ing up and down the wavelengths like a longhair at the Steinway.

Which was just so much wasted time. I couldn't draw a hum out of the audio. Even the more delicate earphones failed to bring in the powerful Mars-Cares beam. And if I couldn't get a message in, it's a damn sure thing I couldn't get one out. My transmission was blanked out.

So I hung a sign on my door, OUT TO LUNCH, and went back to the control turret. It looked like the bleacher entrance to Terra Stadium on the opening day of the Interplanetary Series. Everybody and his brother was there. Officers, engineers, blasters, stewards. Even Slops had come up, armed with a rolling pin, to find out what had happened.

As I entered, Johnny Larkin was turning off the hypatomic power, swiveling around to face the skipper.

"No go, Captain. I've tried anti-grav, neg potential and reverse rockets. We can't get loose. We seem to be in something akin to quicksand. Every move we make digs us in a little deeper."

Bowman growled savagely, "If you hadda used common sense instead o' makin' billy-doos with y'r eyes—but this ain't no time to talk about truffles. What do you think? Is this here planet somethin' like Jupiter? Low specific, so we keep fallin' toward the center?"

Johnny said, "I don't believe so. The material about us is peculiar. It seems to be organic. And it has a certain type of inherent energy—"

"Energy?" I yelled. "Hey, then maybe our Ampie can eat us out of here? That little critter can gobble its way through an H-layer. This dish of planetary junket—"

Larkin glanced up sharply. "And just how would you plan to get the Ampie out of the ship, Sparks?"

"Why, through the lug-sail vent, of course."

"No. Don't try that. I have a feeling—"

He stopped. He didn't say what his feeling was. To tell you the truth, the sharpness of his tone made me just a little bit sore. After all, I'm not the dumbest guy afloat in space. I said stiffly, "Then what do we do to get out of here? Or are we number four on the flit parade?"

Johnny swallowed hard. He said, "I'm the tech man on this freighter. All of you clear out of here. I'll find some way—"

His words dwindled into silence. Lorraine looked at him proudly, patted his cheek. She said, "That's right, Cuddlums. You'll get us out, won't you?"

The skipper said, "Gug!" The crowd broke up and began drifting away. Johnny started fussing with instruments and gadgets. Lorraine soothed his brow by tying strands of his hair into lovers'-knots. I got sick at the stomach looking at them after a while, so I left. Cap Bowman beat me to the bar by three drinks—

IT MUST have been an hour later that we felt it. A jarring *whoomp* beneath our keel. The upset-tummy-in-an-elevator sensation stopped. Bowman looked at me and said, "Larkin? He done somethin', maybe?" and we went back to the bridge.

Larkin had not caused the settling, but he was beaming triumphantly anyway. As we charged in, demanding information, he said, "Why, it's very simple. We have finally come to rest on the surface of Caltech."

"Sue me if I'm wrong," said the skipper, "but somehow I got the impression we landed on this overgrowed custard an hour an' a half ago? Or what's that I see out the ports? A bowl of taffy?"

"No, skipper. We didn't land on the surface before. We landed on a particular kind of matter which is, so far as I have been able to figure out, allied with the peculiar life-form inhabiting this planet."

"Life form? You mean that stuff's alive?"

"Not exactly. That's the point I haven't been able to solve yet. I've made a careful analysis of the stuff. It seems to be a highly complex carbohydrate. Its formula is C6—"

"This ain't no time," I broke in, "to discuss mal-demer. What I want to know is, do we or don't we try my idea about putting out the Ampie? Johnny, maybe—"

"No!" he said.

"Well, why not? What have we got to lose?"

"No!" he said again. Oh, all right. I guess he was preoccupied and didn't mean to be curt. But his tone rekindled my anger, and I didn't feel any better when Lorraine said, "Please, Sparks, don't bother Johnny when he's trying to figure this out. Go ahead, sugar-plum."

So sugar-plum went ahead, and I stalked out of the room. I went to my own turret and tried to read a magazine, but I couldn't get interested in the hokey adventures of a Patrolman on Io when I was buried alive in cosmic goo myself. So I fiddled with the dials again for a while. No soap. So pretty soon I got up and looked in my auxiliary cabinet. My Ampie was curled in inside, pale blue and shot full of tiny red sparks, sucking contentedly on an old-flashlight battery. I put on my rubber gloves. I went down to the engine loft.

Ampies live on energy. And Larkin had said the gelatinous mass engulfing us was at least partially composed of energy. Which made what I did seem, to me, quite logical. I pressed the button that extends the lug-sails of a freighter, heard the machinery creak into motion, lifted my Ampie out of its lead-foil container, and shoved it through the widening vent. Then I waited for things to happen.

THEY did happen! But not what I had expected. I had expected to see the Ampie gnaw a hole through that dough like a St. Bernard working out on a T-bone, rare. But instead, the Ampie touched one shimmering feeler to the mass of gray matter, hummed, sparked, and rolled backward across the room!

I said, "Aw, damn! He was right!" and started to close the lug-vent. But—

It wouldn't close! Because the writhing stickiness was welling into the ship with incredible, fluid swiftness. A heavy, saccharine stench was in the air. Gray streamers fingered toward me. I yelped, slammed tight the engine loft door, and raced for the control turret.

In the middle of the control turret I waited for my breath to catch up with me. Larkin spoke subconsciously from the depths of a deep ponder. "Shh!" he said.

"Shh!" repeated Lorraine. "He's thinking."

"Then tell him to think about pancakes!" I howled. "Because there's a shipful of gray molasses following me up the corridor!"

Larkin started. "What's that?"

I told him. "—it looked like a good idea," I finished, "only it wasn't. Now the stuff's in, and I can't get it out again. It'll fill the whole damned ship—"

But Cap Bowman is no dope. He had already sprung to the audio, was barking orders to other parts of the *Pegasus*.

"Seal port and loft sections of the ship immediately. Lock emergency doors! Get all men into safe sectors!"

Lorraine looked at me worriedly.

"What—what is it, Sparks?"

"Nothing much," I told her grimly, "except that I've just about killed us all. That stuff will ooze through every crack and crevice in the ship, swallow everything just like it swallowed the ship. That's probably what happened to those other explorers. There must have been one dope like me aboard each of them. With a bright idea that—I'm sorry, Mrs. Larkin. I've sure put the final touch on your happy honeymoon."

She was Cap Bowman's daughter; she was the bride of Johnny Larkin. A gal doesn't get to be both of those things without having more innard-stuffings than a sofa-cushion. My words heaved her back on her heels, but only for a fraction of a second. Then, smiling, she turned to Johnny.

"We're not afraid, are we, honey? But you'll have to hurry now."

Larkin pawed his hair frantically.

"I'm doing my best. I've got all the facts. But I still can't quite understand—"

Voices rasped in over the audio. Anderson reported from the sleeping quarters, "All men evacuated, sir. Standing by for further orders." MacPhee snarled defiance from the engine deck, "We've plugged all doors, sirrr! We'll hold this position to the last posseeble minute!"

"It's a form of carbohydrate," mused Larkin aloud. "Plastic. Semi-fluid. But why? Why?"

"Think hard, sugar!" pleaded Lorraine. Larkin said mechanically, "Yes, honey—" Then he stiffened. "Honey!" he said.

I groaned. "This is no time for lovey-dove talk, Johnny!" I cried. "Keep scratching at those gray cells—"

And over the audio, the voice of supercargo Freddy Harkness. "Am abandoning holds, Captain. The invading—er—substance has already covered the aft bins and is moving forward rapidly."

"Seal the safety door, Harkness—" began Bowman.

Then Larkin was at his side, suddenly frantic, eager.

"No, Skipper! Tell him to keep them open a minute! I'll be right there. I need three men!"

He lit out for the door. Bowman cried, "No, son—come back! You'll be killed. Come—"

But he was talking to empty air. Johnny was pounding down the runway. Lorraine sniffled once. Then her jaw hardened. She said, "I'm going after him."

Bowman pushed her into a chair—but hard. He said, "You're waiting here!

With us. You'll only be in his way. Johnny's the tech man on this ship. If anybody can save us, he's the one." But as her head lowered, his eyes met mine. And the words were written there, "Not this time—"

STILL, we had to do something. We couldn't just sit there and take it blind. We had to know what was going on. So we cut in the visiplate to the corridor outside the storage bins. It was a dismal scene that appeared before us.

The long corridor was deserted save for a thin sliver of something oozing out of an adjacent chamber. As we watched, this sliver turned to a bulky, rolling mass; became the doughy body of the mysterious matter in which the *Pegasus* was caught. Like a ponderous wave it surged up the corridor, straining into every crack and crevice, engulfing everything it met.

We saw a tiny, gray ship mouse scurry from under a doorway, hesitate as one pink foot slipped into the sluggish excrescence.

It tugged, trying to get free. But it was like a fly snared on flypaper. It couldn't move. In a few seconds it disappeared. Lorraine began crying softly. I turned away, too sickened to condemn myself again for having loosed this thing amongst us.

Then there were bright gleams in the visiplate, and Johnny, accompanied by three or four not-at-all eager sailors, entered the corridor. As he passed the visiplate, he looked up and grinned at us, nodded encouragingly. Then he ducked into one of the storage bins.

He came out staggering under the load of a heavy, wooden crate. He began ripping the top off this frantically, motioned his assistants to get other similar boxes from the bin and open them. They did so, but one look at their pans told us they didn't like this business nohow!

Finally he had the box open. He tore out a portion of the contents. And—

"Has he gone nuts?" raged Bowman. "That's only that medical junk for Mars! That zy-something extract!"

Johnny made it perfectly clear what he was trying to do. He wrenched the cap off one bottle—and deliberately poured the contents into the nearest pseudopod of the matter now approaching within scant feet of him. Then another bottle; tossed into the mass this time. And another. And another.

Lorraine screamed suddenly, "Daddy, look! He's trapped! Behind him!"

She was right. From another cross-corridor had rolled more of the Caltechian effluvium. It formed a solid barrier through which Johnny and his co-workers could not now escape. They could move neither forward nor backward. In a few minutes the two sluggish tentacles of the syrupy monster would meet. And then—

I said, "Skipper, you'd better turn off the plate."

Bowman nodded. He reached toward the button. Closer and closer, now. In seconds the two walls of matter would coalesce. The sailors had seen their peril. We couldn't hear their voices, but they were apparently pleading with Johnny to let them take refuge in the one, so far untouched, storage vault; seal that door. And he had refused. He was forcing them to hold their ground. All four of them, like himself, were desperately ripping corks from bottles, scattering the medical export into the substance closing in on them.

And then one man slipped! His foot flew from under him, was avidly seized by a tentacle of that slimy mass. His eyes and mouth opened wide; I knew he was screaming.

Larkin stepped forward to grasp his shoulders. The skipper hoarsed, "Look out, son! Behind you!"

It happened all at once. One minute there were two towering walls of fleshy matter surging inexorably down upon the trapped quintet, and the next instant—

The walls collapsed! Just like that! Collapsed into r u n n i n g streams of blotched liquid scum. The sailor's leg slipped free. Johnny toppled over backward into the slippery puddle. A foolish look spread over his face. A look that was mirrored in the faces of his associates. His eyes rolled. He goggled up into the visiplate, kissed his fingers to us, and—and hiccuped! His lips formed a syllable. The syllable was, *"Wheeee!"*

Bowman's shaking fingers sought his jowls. He cried, "My God, he—he's—"

"He's what, Daddy? What?"

"He's as boiled," roared Bowman, "as an owl!"

SOME time later—about twelve hours, to be exact—I dragged him back into the control turret. He was still a little blue from the cold shower. But the fog was out of his brain, and that was what was most necessary. For all of us were dying of curiosity.

Bowman said, "Well, your plan worked, son. We got the ship empty, and like you said we would, we pulled out of the goo we was in. Now we're on our way back to tell Earth about Caltech, and—" he added proudly, "—collect that bonus. 'Cause under that scum is a fortune in ores. But what was the scum? An' how did you know you could bust it up with that there zy—zy—"

"—mase," grinned Johnny. "Zymase, Skipper. Why, it wasn't difficult, once Lorraine supplied the key. You might say I was slow in figuring it out mainly because the disaccharose existed on such a gigantic scale that I could not comprehend it."

"The di— which?" I said.

"Sugar," said Johnny, "to you. Or, more accurately, a form of treacle. Honey-gum.

"Here's what I figure. Subsequent investigation may prove me wrong, of course, but my theory must be fundamentally sound or we wouldn't have escaped.

"Caltecy VI is apparently inhabited by some sort of gigantic insect, which may be of the bee, the spider, or the ant family. Each of these insects, as you know, possesses the power of secreting fluids which it adapts to its private needs. The ant seals nests and wraps larvae in his, the bee builds hives and makes honey, the spider spins threads wherein to trap its prey.

"We were captured in a gigantic 'trap' built by one of these insects, that's all. From what we saw, I judge that most of Caltech's surface must be covered by these gigantic webs. Miles in extent, hundreds of feet deep. Webs of doom for the unwary. Being highly tensile, gummy, irradiated with a rather unusual form of inherent energy, these traps cannot be damaged by rocket blasts." He shook his head soberly. "I can't help thinking of those poor devils who died there. Like human flies in a monster's viscous web—"

I prodded, "Lieutenant, the zymase?"

"Oh, yes. Of course. Well, you know what zymase is, don't you?"

"No," I told him. "Do you?"

"Naturally. A nitrogenous substance, a freshly expressed concentrate of yeast juice. Its action on sugar is to speed up, terrifically, the ordinary process that transpires when sugar and yeast are brought together. In short—*fermentation!*

"As soon as we emptied the zymase concentrate into the flood of honey—for it was that, though I might never have guessed it in time had it not been for you, dear!"

Here he beamed at Lorraine. "—the natural sugar was broken down into carbon dioxide, glycerin, succinic acid, and—er—"

"Urr?" repeated Bowman curiously. "What's that? A new element? Never heard of it."

"And—er—" said Johnny sheepishly, "alcohol! You see, that's why the sailors and I were a trifle—confused—by the atmosphere surroundings us—"

"Confused your hat!" I told him. "You were stewed! But it all makes sense now. The fermentation naturally continued. It loosened up the sticky goo, our blasts dragged us out of the trap. But, say! That alky odor is still all through the ship. We can't air the joint while we're traveling through space. Do you think—?"

But he didn't hear me. For this, after all, was the honeymoon trip of Johnny Larkin. And now, the danger over, he had reverted to type. He and Lorraine looked like a brace of intertwined pretzels.

The skipper coughed. He said, "Sparks? Maybe we—"

I gasped, "Gosh, yes! This red on my face ain't sunburn!"

SO, FOLKS, that was that. Oh—one thing more. I was right. That alky odor *didn't* leave the ship. Don't ask me how we ever got back to Long Island Spaceport.

They told me later we zig-zagged in by way of Mercury and Luna. I wouldn't know. It was just one, long, delirious dream to me. I was two weeks coming out of it.

What a headache! What a hangover! What a honeymoon!

Ring Eclipse

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

Now I have touched the silver moon at last!
  One little part of her was given me,
When, for a magic interval, she cast
  Her shadow on the earth's dull tapestry.

Briefly in silhouette against the sun,
  She made a path of night across the day;
Then, as a cold queen's garment might have done,
  That velvet train of darkness swept away—

But now I smile to see her in the sky,
  Aloof, illusive as a faery gem—
Knowing I touched her shadow passing by,
  And left my fingerprints upon the hem.

"She knelt there in the snowdrifts, arms upflung, to cover her face, abject fear expressed in every line of her body."

Lupa

By ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON

Lupe Dzarkas was a tender, lovable woman—but what was that shape of horror that was found dead on the couch in her room?

"GOD!" said the man in the white coat, huskily.

The hot little room was very still. Almost you might have thought that only its shadows were alive. They moved incessantly, those stark black shadows in the candlelight. They danced and leaped and gibbered. They were never

quiet. But the men who threw those shadows—the man in the white coat bending over the bed, the small man with the cigar beside him, the big man with the twinkling brass buttons at the broken door—all these might well have been dead images in some grotesque waxworks group; so white their faces, so still they were.

The man with the cigar said at last, not moving, "It's—it's not normal, huh, Doc?"

The other nodded, still absorbed. "We'll do a complete dissection down at the morgue," he muttered. "That's the only way we can say positively. But even without it, I can see—the variances are slight, Inspector, slight but definite. The length of limbs, the shape of the head, the very hang of the skeleton and texture of the hair. Nothing is quite right. It's the queerest freak——"

The man with the cigar looked at him.

"Freak?" he echoed softly. "Freak, eh? Well, maybe, Doc. Maybe. It's a handy word to call it by, although I could think of others. . . . Anyhow, it's dead. We can be thankful for that!"

He drew the sheet back up over what lay on the bed; mopped at his forehead with a handkerchief. Somewhere, far off in the night, a dog was howling mournfully.

"Yeah, Doc," said the man with the cigar, "it's dead, and that's just swell! How'd you like to have seen it when it was alive, as Cassidy and that young man say they did? There was still life in the eyes when they broke the door down, they tell me; they rolled in their direction with a sort of pleading look. And the lips twisted in—oh, I guess it was just a dying snarl, Doc. But it looked for all the world as if the thing were *smiling* at 'em. No wonder the young fellow fainted dead away—and that Cassidy got sick at his stomach.

"Just imagine how they felt, Doc! Breaking into a room where they thought a young girl was lying sick and helpless, and finding a thing like that lying on her bed in her place; just as if it was some awful travesty on *Red Riding-Hood,* Doc. Why, it was enough to drive any man out of his mind; much more that poor young devil who was so in love with her. He just sits with his head in his hands and moans 'Lupa! O God! My Lupa!' over and over again. I tell you, if I don't locate that girl and bring her back to him——

"I've thrown out a police dragnet all over town, of course. And I'll have a nation-wide broadcast of her description. If she's to be found, Doc, we'll find her for him; that much is sure. But—you'll notice I said 'If'! Myself, I've got no faith at all that we'll ever see her again. Why? Well, Doc, partly because of that thing over there on her bed. . . .

"What am I talking about? Well, Doc, it's awfully hard to put my meaning into words that a scientist like you can understand. Those queer, monstrous hintings that have come down to us from mankind's very beginnings—they don't mean a thing to you. You aren't superstitious. But I am, Doc! I'm Irish, you see. I believe in ghosts and hoodoos and banshees and—well, in whatever I'm afraid this girl was, Doc. Maybe it's silly to be like that, and then again maybe it isn't. It's a question we can't settle, Doc, no matter how much we talk. But all I know is that after I leave this place tonight I'm going to church, Doc; to a church I've not set foot in since I was a little shaver! And I'm going to pray to the good God that protects us all from the Powers of Darkness. . . .

"Look, Doc! I'll try to put this thing in some sort of way so that you can get it. I'll take it according to *evidence,* not just according to what I happen to think or feel. I'll give you facts, Doc; hard concrete facts that there's no getting away from—as solid as that stiff, dead thing under the sheet yonder. . . .

"OH, I don't just mean the fact of this girl's disappearance and the fact that *something else* was found dead in here after she vanished. That isn't conclusive, Doc; and I know it just as well as you! But let me ask you just one question, Doc: How did the girl get out? That door wasn't just locked when they broke it in, you know. It was bolted, with a bolt set on the inside! And the window was locked and shuttered, also in a way that couldn't be done from without! So unless there's some trick exit from this room we've not found yet—either there's a secret passage out of this place or else—or else I'm right and you're wrong, Doc! There's just no other way of figuring it. You and your thousand years or so of 'scientific progress' are wrong, and we're right back in the Dark Ages amid all the terrors of forgotten superstition. . . .

"How'd she get out of here, Doc? Not a living soul in the boarding-house saw her go. None of 'em doubted for an instant that she was still locked up in here with one of her 'spells'. . . .

"Oh, yes, she had 'spells', Doc! Just what sort they were no one seems to know, because she never let anyone see her at such times. She'd just lock herself in her room for days at a time, refusing to let anyone call a doctor or do anything for her. She'd just lie in the dark like some poor sick animal. Half the time she wouldn't even eat anything; trays the landlady brought up just piled up untasted in the corridor. Oh, they say that once in a while a tray would disappear, but never while anyone was near to see the girl open the door and take it in!

"Sometimes she wouldn't even answer 'em when they tried to talk to her through the door, to ask her whether she was in pain or needed anything. And when she did reply, her voice—well, they tell me it didn't sound like a human voice at all, Doc. It was strange, hoarse, guttural, as if the poor kid could hardly talk at all, as if she were forcing every word through a throat twisted almost out of human semblance. But all she'd say to them was 'I'm—all—right!' over and over again. 'Don't worry. I'm—all—right.'

"It must have been hell for all the boarders at such times, Doc, but worst of all for this young man I told you about. The suspense of it, the awful mystery! But he always respected her wishes, you see, and never disturbed her. It was only after a week had gone by without a word from her, when he couldn't even hear her breathing or moving on the other side of the door, that he got scared and called in Cassidy off the beat. Oh yes, she's had plenty of time to get away in, Doc—providing she could go out under the crack of the door or through the keyhole like a ghost! There just isn't any other way out of here.

"And this thing in her place, dead on her bed, I suppose it came in through the crack or the keyhole too, after she was gone? If it were any other girl but this Lupa Dzarkas, you might think she'd been keeping a pet up here secretly, and left it behind when she disappeared. I've heard of people doing things like that. But not this girl, Doc! No, sir! Because, you see, pets and this Lupa Dzarkas just didn't mix! There was some queer quality about her that frightened beasts and birds. Just a pretty, sweet, harmless-looking kid, Doc, and yet the mere sight of her would send almost any animal into paroxysms of terror. . . .

"There was that time her young man told me about, when the dogs—although their attitude wasn't exactly fearful on that occasion, I'll have to admit. But perhaps their very numbers gave 'em confidence. Perhaps they ganged up against something they hated more than they dreaded.

"But I'd better tell this yarn the way he tells it, Doc. This Ralph Evans, a decent sort of chap, bookish and bespectacled and sort of frail, but nice—I liked him a lot.

"HE'D been working late at the library that night, he says; the night of the worst blizzard of the year. He left about eleven, and plowed home through the thick snow-clouds with his coat-collar turned up against the howling wind and his arms full of books, his mind a thousand miles removed from Lupa Dzarkas. As a matter of fact, he says, he'd only met the girl a few times up until then. She'd been at his boarding-house only a few weeks, and they'd said 'Hello' to each other when they met in the corridors or in the dining-room and chatted a bit, and that was about all. He wasn't even thinking about her now as he turned into his home-street—though the blizzard was so thick he couldn't even read the sign-posts, and waded up it through the fast-piling drifts and the sifting white curtain that was freezing cold against his face.

"Then suddenly he halted as if he'd hit a brick wall. There ahead of him, not ten feet off——

"The thing he saw just didn't seem real to him at first, he says. It was more like some sort of queer stage tableau. There was even a handy lamp-post to throw a sort of spotlight over the scene, leaving everything beyond in deepest shadow. And in that circle of dazzling light, he realized, a girl was kneeling.

"She knelt there in the snowdrifts, arms flung up to cover her face, abject fear expressed in every line of her body. The white flakes sifted gently down over the scarcely lesser whiteness of perfect arms and shoulders, over the delicate curves and molding of a figure that might well have been the masterpiece of some old Greek sculptor. Stark naked she knelt there in all that bitter cold, naked save for her unbound white-gold hair that shimmered over her body like a garment, or an animal's white fur. And about her, as she cowered there, a dozen smaller shapes were crouching.

"It seemed to him that every dog in the neighborhood was gathered there. He knew several of them by sight; an old lady's pet 'Peke', a wire-haired terrier the children next door played with, the corner grocer's dachshund, a couple of small mongrels—all the most harmless sort of little beasts imaginable. But they weren't harmless to the girl, you could see that! They ringed about her with hackles standing up with rage and little bodies tense, with teeth bared and eyes glowing a yellowish green. And the whole circle of them was slowly closing in. . . .

"HOW long he stood there staring like a fool, he has no idea. It must have been a long time. He simply couldn't believe what he saw. The girl, kneeling helpless and stricken there in the freezing snow, the slowly tightening circle of little creatures that hunted her down—good Lord! Those harmless little neighborhood tykes! And yet it might almost have been a scene from some old Russian folk-tale, with the wolves about to pull down some forlorn exile on the steppes! . . .

"He came to life at last, of course. He sprang forward, shouting at the dogs. Just as he did so a big black mongrel, an evil-looking brute he'd never seen about before, launched himself straight at the girl's throat. Young Evans' rush caught him in mid-leap, bowled him over in the snow. Then the rest of them charged. There was quite a mêlée for a moment, a boiling-up of little shapes about him, the flash of savage worrying little fangs and a rush of thudding forms against his body. He struck and kicked and cursed and almost went down beneath the savage, silent rush of them—that was the most terrifying part of it all, he says. The silence! Not one of those little beasts gave tongue, Doc. Not one of them yelped when hurt or snarled when attacking. They fought silently, grimly as shadows.

"Then suddenly it was all over. He stood holding an unconscious girl in his arms, amid a circle of trampled, blood-stained snow. The dogs were gone. He hadn't seen them go, hadn't seen the flitting shapes of them fade away in the blizzard. They just weren't there any longer! There were only those fast-disappearing little tracks in the snow to show that the whole thing hadn't been some sort of delusion. Far off, through the storm, he made out the glowing lights of his boarding-house, beacons of sanity. He made for them, carrying the girl, her unconscious head on his shoulder. . . .

"He says he knew right then that he was in love with her, Doc! Right then. It didn't need all their ripening friendship during the months that followed. He'd fought for his woman like some knight of old, and he felt that she belonged to him and him alone.

"And yet he never really learned much about her in all that time. About this pretty, platinum-haired girl with the queer lisping accent that hinted at a foreign origin, for all her American dress and American ways—about her there was always a veil of mystery he couldn't penetrate. Up to a point her life was an open book. She was not in the least reticent or secretive about herself; he'd never known a franker, more open, more winning personality. She was everybody's friend in the boarding-house, always ready to do a kindness, always gay and friendly and loyal to a fault. And yet, for all her frankness and friendliness, she contrived it somehow that no one should ever really know much about Lupa Dzarkas.

"Queer name, ain't it, Doc? Lupa Dzarkas. A name you wouldn't run across very often. The first word means—well, I know enough Latin for that, Doc. And that last name, what is it? Central-European, Magyar, Pole? The young man says she spoke of Transylvania several times, seemed to know that country very well. Does that mean anything to you, Doc? Well, it does to me. You see, we had a guy on the squad once who came from that part of the world. He used to wear a sprig of 'wolf-bane' in his buttonhole all the time, Doc, as a charm to keep off things that were neither quite human nor quite unhuman, Doc, but that ranged the steppes of his native land in either shape at will and lived off human blood—I wish we had him here now, Doc. He could make this thing clearer to you than I can hope to.

"Look, Doc! These 'attacks' of hers were genuine, whatever they were. Everyone in this house agrees on that. But why wouldn't she let anyone do anything for her at such times, or even see her? Why did she hide herself away from everyone for at least three days out of each month, Doc; days corresponding roughly to the full of each moon? Why is it that no one ever saw her when she was ill, until this time when they burst in her door and found—well, not a human being in this room at all?

"What did it mean, a young girl hiding herself away from everyone like that, at a time when she was supposed to be so ill that she could hardly move, when she couldn't eat anything or drink anything, when she was so stricken that all she could do was lie on her bed and moan and whine and howl—yes, howl, Doc! Even her young man admits that there were delirious intervals when her weird cries kept everyone in the house awake at night—when the only answer she could make to questions was to croak in that changeling voice, 'I'm—all—right!—I'll—be—all—right!'

"And she always would be, too! That was the strangest part of all. After days of lying helpless, hardly able to talk, stricken—days and nights during which the whole household would almost go crazy with worry for her—then suddenly the

door would open and out she'd come, looking not a whit worse for her ordeal. Indeed, she'd look better, somehow, the young man said; refreshed, strengthened in some bizarre way he couldn't describe. Her color would be better, her eyes clearer, her smile gayer and more ready. And she'd laugh at all their questions about that cloistered interval, treat the whole thing as if it had been some sort of monstrous hoax.

"IT USED to drive this young man of hers almost crazy, not knowing what was wrong, not being able to help her. He begged her to see a doctor, to try to do something for the trouble, whatever it was.

" 'There's no medicine on this earth for what I've got,' she told him once, 'and no doctor on earth who could help me. There's no treating a thing that's in the blood, that's been bred into a family strain over long generations. Every man and woman of my line since time immemorial has borne this taint from birth until death. There is no escaping it. My parents fled to America from the old country hoping that they might leave it behind, escape into a new world and a new life. But the taint followed them, dogged them to their dying day. It cannot be cured. It can't even be explained. A doctor? Ah, my poor friend, I should like to see the face of any doctor to whom I so much as tried to tell what is wrong with me! And even if by some miracle he should believe me, what could he do? There is no drug that can stay, no medicine that can cure a malady like mine; a thing that's seared into the very bones, twisted into the very fibers and sinews and veins of the body, eaten into the very mind by generation upon generation of evil heredity! There is no hope for me in heaven or hell.

" 'But I have sworn,' she went on, 'that I shall bear my cross alone, that no one else shall suffer or be harmed through me. The sickness I have is contagious—not perhaps quite in the sense that you use that word, but contagious nevertheless, at the time when it is at its height. And so I shut myself away from everyone, lock myself up, lest unknowingly I should hurt those who seek to help me, that I should make them too into beings like myself, outcasts from all hope either here or hereafter.'

"And that was all the young man ever found out about what ailed her, Doc, throughout all those long months when he was her constant companion, when he was quite certain that love of him was growing in her heart. He tried in every way to find out what disease, what strange obscure ailment could have symptoms like that. He says he haunted every medical library in town, read everything that he could get his hands on. He even consulted physicians unknown to Lupa. But of course they only pulled long faces and spouted long Latin words that meant only 'Damned if I know!' Doc, when you figured them out. And the medical books told him just as little.

"At last he couldn't bear the suspense any longer, Doc. He cornered the girl one night last week on the porch swing, after the rest of the boarders had retired and they had the veranda to themselves. It's been an unusually hot fall, you know; and the air that night was sultry and still, like the weather just before a storm, you know. A sort of suspense was in the air. The noises of the city were as faint and far off as if they were alone in the heart of a wilderness. A nearly-full moon was rising. . . .

" 'Lupa,' young Evans told her then, 'this thing can't go on. I love you, dear —don't you understand?—I love you! I can't let you go on facing the horror of this secret by yourself. Whatever it is, we'll share it, fight it, beat it together. Will you be my wife, darling, and let me help you with all your troubles—always?'

"He took her into his arms. A little breeze rustled among the few last wisteria blooms left on the porch vines. . . .

"HE SAYS for one moment of heaven he thought he'd won, Doc. She answered his kisses, her body pressed against his, her arms locked tight about him. Her soft lips crushed against his so vehemently that he could feel little sharp teeth through them. And her eyes—well, he'd heard of a woman's eyes 'shining with love,' Doc, but he'd never realized that it was literal before. But her eyes actually did shine in the darkness, he says. They began to glow, with a sort of queer greenish inner light.

"Then suddenly she wrenched herself free of his embrace and sprang up. 'Oh, no!' she cried, her voice strangely hoarse. 'What am I thinking of? What was I about to do—oh God, no!' She retreated from him, hands thrown up before her—how horribly that gesture reminded him of that other night long months before!—retreated until he couldn't see her face any more, but only the whiteness of her dress and the whiteness of her strange hair, a blurred outline that might almost have been a wreath of fog but for the glinting of green eyes in it.

" 'Lupa!' he begged; 'Lupa! Please, dear, come back! Please!'

"She didn't answer, just stood there motionless and utterly still. He could hear the soft whispering of that little breeze in the vines, the far-off howling. Then suddenly her hands went to her throat. She made a little sound, as if she were trying to speak—a strange, guttural sound that somehow terrified him. Then she turned and ran across the veranda and into the house. He caught a glimpse of her, silhouetted against the hallway's light for an instant as she passed; a silhouette with vaguely disturbing outlines. Then she was gone. There was a pattering of footsteps along the upper hall and the distant closing of a door. . . .

" 'Whatever was the matter with Lupa Dzarkas?' his landlady asked a moment later. 'She just passed me on the stairs, running like mad, and didn't speak or look up. She was all crouched down, and her hair was hanging over her face.' "

IT WAS very still in the hot little room. Almost you might have thought, as the voice of the man with the cigar died away in the silence, that only its leaping shadows had life.

"And you think——?" the man in the white jacket said at last, softly.

The man with the cigar nodded.

"Yeah," he said with equal softness; "yeah, Doc, that's exactly what I think. That's why I sent for you, Doc, after I'd heard this young fellow's story just as I told it to you just now. I sent for a doctor because I wanted to know whether that—well, whatever it was that he found when he broke into his sweetheart's room—was normal or abnormal. Not that it really makes a bit of difference, Doc, because it's the thing's very presence here that strains all coincidence.

"For listen to one last bit of proof, Doc. Listen to this description of Lupa Dzarkas that her young man gave me. It's accurate, I think. He wants me to look for someone 'tall and slim and aristocratic-looking, graceful and quick in her movements, beautiful and intelligent, with great melting black eyes and almost snow-white platinum hair and skin.' And that isn't at all hard to do, Doc. Because, you see, what answers that description to the last detail is lying right here, on this very bed."

He flung the sheet back. In the candlelight the sprawled form there was very hard to see. But you could make it out. . . .

"A wolf-hound, Doc!" the man with the cigar muttered. "A great snow-white wolf-hound! . . ."

"The dog that howls is supposed to be John Carver's dog, and therefore—not alive."

Person or Persons Unknown

By LORETTA BURROUGH

The murderer and his dog could not rest in the crossroads grave where they had been buried.

THE car pulled up out of the mist and I saw Paul's house before me on the hill, a single light shining in it, the long old line of its roof folding like a wing above it. It was a large house built large for those great families that men used to have, and I thought that Paul must feel like a small pea rattling about in it. In his letter, he had said he was lonely; he had written that he missed Mary and the children so much that he felt like a ghost in a place it doesn't want to haunt. Paul was usually a cheerful man; that letter, with its curious undertone of unhappiness, had startled me into taking his invitation, if for nothing more than to satisfy myself he was really all right.

Almost before I had brought the car to

a stop on the driveway, the house door opened and Paul ran down the steps, as though he had been watching for me. He opened the car door and thrust his hand in.

"Oh, Rob, this is fine!" he cried, shaking my hand. "I certainly am glad to see you! Come in and get warm and have a drink." He said it just like that, in spurts of words, while he nearly wrung my fingers off.

I told him how glad I was to see him, got out, and helped carry my bags into the house, but I was startled, taken aback. He had made me think of a drowning man who sees a boat put out toward him from a rescue ship. The sight of me had made him too happy.

"How have you been?" I said, looking closely at him in the lighted hall.

"Don't give me that clinical eye," he said with a little laugh. "You doctors—"

He stood there smiling nervously as though he objected to being looked over, and I saw that he had lost a great deal of weight, for one thing. Under his eyes were the dark muddy shadows that came from chronic fatigue, and his hands, lighting a cigarette, were shaky.

"You make me feel like a bug under a microscope," he complained. "No, I haven't been sleeping well, and what of it? Come on in and have that drink!"

"Sure," I said. I followed him into the large low beamed living-room. A great fire poured blistering heat from the enormous hearth. At one end of the long room was a big curved window of many paned glass, and I could see the light of the risen moon beginning to shine on what was left of the garden.

"You must be proud of your house," I said, taking my filled glass from him. "What you've done to it, I mean." Paul's family had built the house before the Revolution. But in the middle eighteen hundreds they had migrated to New York, and the house, in other hands, had slipped steadily downhill until it was little better than a wreck when Paul bought it back. "It must be nice to think, that after so many years, Crawfords are living in it again."

"Ye-es," he said, as though he weren't sure. "I'll be glad when Mary and the children get home. It's too big for one man—I just rattle around in it. Our maid left us to get married, just before Mary went away, so I'm all alone here—" He frowned down into the leaping fire, forgetting the drink he held in his hand. "But I manage all right. A cleaning woman comes out from the village every morning—after the sun is well up."

There was something so queer in his voice when he said that, and in the look with which he stared into the fire, that I was startled. "You wouldn't want her before dawn, would you?"

"The days are getting so short," he said, which was hardly any answer. "And the whole village is afraid of the dark." Then he looked at me, as though he had been talking to himself, and had just realized it. "Well, cheer up. I'm a very good cook, you know, and we shan't have to wash any slops."

His face brightened slowly. "What nonsense one gets to think, living alone! It's good for me you're here. And next week, before you go, Mary and the children will be back." He lifted the glass he had forgotten and took a long drink. "Her mother's much better, thank God! I'd almost begun to hate the old lady for keeping Mary so long."

While we talked, my thoughts circled uneasily about the queer things he had said a moment ago. What was behind his remark that the whole village was afraid of the dark? Why was Paul reduced to this bundle of nerves and fatigue? I watched him, making up my mind that even if he did not mean to tell me, I would find out —a doctor generally can.

THE dinner was excellent, and we ended it up with coffee and cigars and that long lazy talk of friends who have not met for a long time. I don't know how we got on the subject of the drought that had been sitting like a dry spider on the eastern states for months, but we did.

"It made a mess of our garden," Paul said. "But it did other more interesting things around here. Maybe you read about it in the papers?" Over his face passed a curious look like the flick of a shadow. "Stirred up a peck of village superstition, and—but come out on the lawn and I'll show you." He was already getting up from the table, and I followed him.

"You don't need your coat," he said, opening the door.

It was very mild for December, with the full moon a plate of clear platinum in the sky, and bits of mist rolling at the bottom of the hill. Covington Reservoir gave off a silky gleam under the moon, and I could see, more than a mile away, the sharp lights of the village like loops of diamonds.

"There, you see," Paul said, stretching out his hands, "where the water of the reservoir has receded and dried up—those lines of stones?"

"It looks like a couple of roads," I said, "or what's left of them. Crossing, and then going right on into the reservoir."

"They *are* roads, old Revolutionary roads—they used to build them that way, with walls of stones on either side." He stood looking down into the hazy shine with brooding eyes. "Somewhere by that crossing, an old enemy of the family is buried—John Carver. A queer place to bury him, you'll think, but it seems he was hanged." He let his hand fall to his side. "Those roads, that grave, have lain under water for generations."

I watched the mist running like tumbleweed through the moonlight, almost as though there was something down there, alive and coiling in the soft shine. The queer roads that ended in water, the hidden shamed grave, the empty landscape, were quiet and slightly sinister. "That's interesting," I said, "but what's it got to do with village superstition? The grave, I suppose?"

"Oh—" Paul said, and my sidewise glance at him startled me—I got somehow the impression that he was watching for something, almost that he expected to see someone move down there in the indefinite curling mists. "There's a village jingle, dating way back." He took his eyes from the roads and looked at me. "It goes something like this:

"'When water dries up and is precious in the cup,
When Carver grave and Crawford House stand face to face,
There will be trouble in this place.'"

He gave a small impatient noise, like a grunt. "The idea being that if the reservoir ever receded enough to let Mr. Carver come up for air, all sorts of horrid things would begin to happen. Notice how quiet we are around here? The villagers all use the others road at night. They'd rather bust their springs than pass this place."

Now that he spoke of it, I felt the quiet, like a sponge that had sucked every sound from the air. "All because of a jingle?" I said.

"Oh, no!" He opened the door behind us. "Let's go in—I get tired of watching those mists run around. No—it seems since the water receded, they see unpleasant things in the bushes and so forth."

"Such as?"

"Now who knows? Let a man get a couple of drinks of the village booze in him and he could see anything." Paul went back into the living-room and stood above the fire, kneading his hands as though they were cold. "What started all this—a long time ago I had a great-great-

something-or-other who was a Judge Crawford. It seems he coveted John Carver's wife. He had Carver 'framed,' we'd call it; presided with great pleasure at his trial, and saw that he was hanged." Paul stretched his long slender body wearily as he looked at me. "Whether the judge got Carver's wife or not I don't know, but he must have found the neighborhood disagreeable in some way, because he moved promptly to New York and sold this house. It had a number of owners or renters who never stayed long—you know what happens when a place gets a bad name for any silly reason."

He put his hands up into his hair and rubbed his scalp as though his head ached. "Then they made this reservoir, eighty years or so ago, drowning the crossroads and the grave, and this house was occupied steadily with no complaints until I bought it back. I believe my unpleasant ancestor died peacefully in his bed in New York, but I really couldn't say."

"What an old wives' tale!" I said. "'When Carver grave and Crawford House stand face to face, there will be trouble in this place.' Of course, there's been nothing that you've noticed?"

PAUL did not speak for a moment, and when he did, it was hardly an answer. "I should hope I have enough brains not to imagine things," he said. "Well, you must be tired after your drive. I've looked your room over with the proper housewife's eye—I think you'll be comfortable."

The trip *had* tired me, and I was glad of his suggestion. He put me in a pleasant room that communicated with his, and I undressed at once and went to bed. But I did not sleep, possibly because it was a strange bed, or because I was too tired. And there was a dog howling somewhere near by, with a tiresome persistence that stretched my nerves.

Paul could not sleep either. I heard him through the closed door between our rooms, turning on the bed with a creaking of springs, punching his pillow, giving the stifled sighs of fatigue that could not rest. Finally, after some hours, he became quiet, and I lay there listening to the everlasting howls of the dog, and the noise the wind made clattering the bare branches of the trees. I remembered that when I had been there before, occasionally in the night you could hear a car go by on the road, but now I heard nothing—apparently it was true that this road was shunned at night. What rot! I thought, turned over in bed, and was preparing myself for the hundredth time to sleep, when suddenly I jerked up on one elbow, then leaped out of bed.

The light was on in Paul's room when I got there. He sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the wall; his hands were clenched, and his face ran with sweat.

I turned his head up, so that I could look into his eyes. For a moment they did not look sane; they stared at me, blank and black. And then he shuddered.

"Get into bed," I ordered. "What was it, Paul?" I had never heard a man scream quite like that before— I never wanted to hear such a sound again. I pushed him back under the covers, and pulled the blankets up to his chin; through my fingers I could feel the deep racking shivers that shook his body. But his eyes were losing that look of black overwhelming horror.

"A nightmare," he said with a gasp. "Only a nightmare. I have them all the time."

"Of a very unpleasant sort?" If this was the kind of company he entertained at night, it was no wonder he looked such a stranger to sleep.

"Quite disagreeable," he said, forcing a grin. "Let's not talk about it."

"But something ought to be done about it." I revolved in my mind items of exercise and diet, which I would take up with

him in the morning. "I'll give you something to make you sleep."

"Please," he said. "I've been afraid to take anything by myself except mild bromides, and they don't do the trick."

"I've something in my bag that will." I gave him a moderate dose of luminol and waited by him until he was asleep, then turned off the lights, pushed his window open wider, and stood by it looking out for a moment. I was puzzled. Anyone can have a nightmare now and then as a result of physical indiscretion, but a steady diet of nightmare so that sleep becomes a hardship and terrible—

THE moon was behind a cloud, and its soft muffled light cast a haze over the lonely landscape. I remembered that the Bible said it is not good for man to be alone, and I wondered if the absence of Mary and the children hadn't something to do with Paul's nightmares. I was about to turn away and go back to bed, feeling my eyes burn from lack of sleep, when I stopped my yawning and stared. Surely something had moved, there by that clump of bushes near the house? It seemed to me that I could pick out the outline of a man who watched the house, something so set and strange in his attitude, that the skin prickled on the back of my neck. I turned my eyes away, and when I looked back, the figure was gone.

The sky was beginning to lighten in the east, and I could hear the soft dawn wind rustling dead leaves. I had imagined it, I said to myself. I was tired; my eyes were tired—some tiny temporary blot on the retina had made itself into a human likeness standing in the shadow of the trees. And yet, I went to bed not quite satisfied. It seemed to me that the figure had had a distinctness not usual when the eyes and the imagination make one up.

We both slept late the next morning. I had finished shaving and dressed when Paul called me for breakfast, and I saw at once that he was better.

"Rob," he said, sitting down at the table, and pouring orange juice from a pitcher into my glass, "that's the first good night's sleep I've had in a month. But I suppose you doctors disapprove of that kind of sleep."

"We certainly do." I studied him thoughtfully. "If I know you, you've been working too hard on your new book. No exercise to speak of, not enough sleep even before this nightmare business started."

"True," he said, slipping bread into the toaster. "With Mary and the kids gone, there wasn't anything to do except work."

"So now your nerves are all tied up in knots. How about a holiday for the week I'm here? Is there any hard manual labor we could do outdoors—about eight hours of it every day? It wouldn't hurt me, and it's all you need."

"Sure," he said. "I've got a woodlot, up back of the house. We could cut next winter's firewood. Dull but wholesome."

"Fine." I drank my orange juice with a more comfortable feeling about Paul—a week's hard work in the open air can cure almost anything. "By the way," I said, "have you any suspicious characters in the neighborhood? When I looked out your window last night, I could have sworn there was someone there in the bushes, watching the house. It may have been purely subjective, and yet—"

Paul's face lost color. "You saw him too," he said. "That's interesting. Twice I've chased all through those bushes with a gun in my hand, but there's never anybody there."

"Either there is or there isn't," I said after a moment. "I mean, since there was nobody there, it was a trick of shadows and bushes which can be seen from your window. You have too many bushes around this house anyway—you should cut some of them down."

"Sometimes I think the house should be cut down," he said dismally, and then he smiled. "My nerves *are* in knots, aren't they?"

"Of course," I said. "You never were one to imagine things, Paul—at least, not outside your books."

I heard a key click in the lock of the back door, and looked at Paul.

"Mrs. Butts," he said. "She does my chores. I wonder what tall tales she'll have thought up overnight."

WHEN Mrs. Butts came in, I thought she didn't look the sort for tall tales, a round, dumpy, wholesome little woman.

"It's a fine day, Mr. Crawford," she said. "I had such a nice brisk walk up—I do like it when it's nice and cheerful around here."

"Who doesn't?" Paul said rather crossly. "This is my friend, Doctor Leonard, Mrs. Butts."

"How do you do, sir?" she said. "I'm sure it must be real pleasant for Mr. Crawford to have you with him."

"Pleasant for me," I said. "I'm looking forward to my week."

"Yes, indeed, sir," she said non-committally, and disappeared into a closet behind the kitchen door. When she came out, she was swallowed by an ample Mother Hubbard. "I stopped at Mrs. Andrews' on my way up. She said the dog howled something fierce last night."

"I slept like a baby," Paul said, crumbling the toast on his plate. "I heard nothing."

I looked at his face, puzzled by it—it was secret, a little angry. And why should he deny that he had heard the dog?

"There *was* a dog howling last night," I said. "Some farmer's dog, no doubt, sitting on a hilltop and yelling at the full moon."

"Of course, sir," Mrs. Butts said unbelievingly. "Well, I must be about my work."

When she left us, Paul got up from the table with an irritated shove at his chair. "Shall we go out and chop down a few trees? That sort of thing goes on all the time—you'd think the village wanted to drive me nuts."

"But she didn't say anything," I said, following him.

"No, not much," he said. "The dog that howls is supposed to be John Carver's dog, and therefore—not alive."

I took that in silence, as he opened the door and we went out into the sharp shining day. "But what nonsense it is, Paul" I said slowly, as he stopped by the cellar door and picked up the axes. "It's no wonder you have nightmares! All this village gossip—you laugh at it and ignore it when you're awake. But your unconscious looks it over, picks it up, wonders about it—and trots it out at night when you're asleep. The unconscious holds everything that's primitive and frightened in us."

"I shouldn't wonder if that isn't why I dream," he said with a brightening look.

"Of course it is." I was satisfied with the common sense of my explanations. And yet, as we walked up the bright hillside towards the woodlot, I remember that I turned and looked back at the house, and at the bushes that grew on the side where Paul's room was. It annoyed and disturbed me just a little to see that among the small spruces and clusters of rhododendrons, was nothing that could possibly be the size and shape of a man.

"YOU look a different fellow," I said, glancing over at him where he sat yawning healthily in the big wing chair. He certainly wasn't the hollow-cheeked, gaunt, nervous specimen I had found a week ago. "You're ruining all Mrs.

Butts' expectations of a Crawford doom."

"That's too bad. I feel marvelous. Lucky for me you came up, I guess. I was beginning to *believe* all that slush." He got to his feet and stood smiling down at me. "It's great to think Mary's coming home tomorrow. And the kids. I'll be a family man again."

"Better for you." I was anxious to try an experiment. Every night since I had come, I had given Paul the sleeping-tablets, and he had slept deep and well. Tonight, I intended to dose him with a harmless sugar pill. He wouldn't know the difference, but his nervous system would, and if he slept soundly, I might congratulate myself on having cured him. "It's getting late, Paul. How about bed?"

"I can do with it. We deserve it."

We put out the lights and went up to bed.

I gave him the innocuous sugar pill, and saw him swallow it, before I went to take my bath. When I came back, he was sound asleep already, with the deeply relaxed look of one who has earned his sleep.

I went to bed myself then, but I did not get to sleep at once. Almost as soon as I had crawled between the sheets, the dog began to howl, somewhere off in the distance. It was the most mournful, irritating night noise I have ever heard, sometimes far away, sometimes quite near the house. It had howled every night since I had come, and once or twice it had sounded so very close I had got out of bed to look, but had never caught a glimpse of it. I hardly wondered, as I lay and listened to it, that the superstitious villagers said it wasn't alive. The sound rose and fell with a desolate unearthly wildness that made the spine tingle. It's starting early tonight, I thought, looking at the illuminated dial of the clock by the bed. Wondering why somebody hadn't shot the animal long ago, I dug my head into the bedclothes, and tired from hard exercise in the open, was soon asleep.

I don't know what it was that waked me, whether sound or motion, but I sat up with my heart thundering, as you often do when shocked awake. The house was still; I could not hear even the howling of the dog, but some pressure in my nerves, stronger than common sense, warned me that something was wrong. I slid out of bed at once, and went into Paul's room. The bedclothes had been thrown half off the bed, as though he had jumped out in a hurry, but the room was empty.

The hall outside our rooms was dark and no light showed in the bottom of the house. I shouted, "Paul! Paul!" several times, and heard nothing but my own voice falling into the flat silence. Some impulse pulled me to the hall window. I saw Paul at once. He was walking down across the field toward the old roads; in the light of the waning moon, his shadow drifted beside him over the frozen ruts. I watched him for a second longer before I realized what it was that puzzled me in his gait. He was not awake. He was walking in his sleep, to fulfill some plan his sleeping mind had made.

I ran back to my room for shoes, hurried down the stairs, and snatched my overcoat from the foyer closet. There is always grave danger of accident to a sleep-walker, and I was afraid that he might walk into the reservoir or injure himself in the stony fields.

The air was bitterly sharp, and so still that I could hear the soft, muffled thunder of a train that was miles away. A few flakes of snow began to drift down as I ran quickly across the dim field, my feet slipping on the hard hummocks and ridges. A fold in the land hid Paul from me at first, and when I saw him he was well along on the old road, walking steadily toward the crossroads as though he meant to

meet someone and was late for the appointment.

As soon as I reached the fairly smooth surface of the road, I ran faster, and caught up with him quickly. I took hold of his arm gently, and said in a low voice, "Paul, Paul—"

A single convulsive shiver ran over him as the chain with sleep snapped, and his eyes looked at me. His jaw dropped, and his eyes expanded with a black terror—there was a worse look in them than I have ever seen in the eyes of a dying man. I saw at once that he was going to faint, and I was ready when he gave a single choked cry and slid against me, his knees loosening.

I don't know how I got him up to the house.

Paul was a big man, and an unconscious body is dead weight, but I managed it somehow—mainly because there was no help, and I knew I had to. I got him up to his bed, wrapped him in blankets, and succeeded in pouring some brandy between his teeth.

"You're all right, Paul," I said, as soon as his eyes opened. "You're here with me. You're safe."

The blank look of terror persisted in them for a moment and then they cleared. "Lord," he said with an effort, "that was the worst yet. Was I dreaming again? Was that all?"

"I found you down by the old roads. You were sleep-walking."

He turned his head on the pillow, and stared at the wall. "This can't go on," he said in a voice that dragged with misery. "Up to now, all I've dreamed was that something was after me. I could never see it clearly—all I knew was it hated me and meant to harm me. Always, at the last moment as we were about to come to grips, I would wake up."

He closed his hands over his eyes. "This time," he said, "I thought I was walking down the old road. There was someone walking in front of me, but I couldn't see him well because he had a hood over his head." He broke off. "All the while, I felt the most awful cold helpless terror, but I couldn't seem to go back to help myself in any way. Then he stopped, waiting for me to come up to him, and as I came abreast of him, he turned and I saw his face—"

"What was it like?" I said, watching him closely. He was clay-colored, and the pupils of his eyes had expanded until the black almost swallowed the irises.

"I don't know," he said. "It was terribly distorted. It was very dark with congested blood—blood had run down from his nose, and the eyes were almost starting out of the head. There was a piece of rope about his neck with the knot tied under one ear. Then he put out his hand toward me—" He moved in the bed with a low sigh. "That's all I remember, thank God."

I went to my medicine kit, filled a hypodermic and brought it back to the bed. "We'll talk it over in the morning," I said. "I want you to go to sleep now."

I SAT down beside him then, and waited until he fell into the deep, drugged sleep. I was very uneasy and puzzled. This weird senseless nightmare, that had grown to such power that it had driven him asleep out of his bed—Remembering his description of the man in his dream, I reflected that his unconscious mind had made up a very faithful picture of a man who had died by hanging.

Whatever was wrong with Paul, exercise had not cured it, nor could drugs be anything more than a temporary and dangerous makeshift. I was sitting there in the cold bedroom, puzzling over ways and means to help him, when suddenly under the window, with an abruptness that made

the hair rise on the back of my head, the howling of the dog started up.

I put out the light and went quickly to the window. I was bound that I was going to see it this time. For a moment blinded because I had been in the light, I seemed to peer out at a wall of dim, dark plush, and then details began to appear. I saw them almost at once through the lightly falling snow—the man standing half in and half out of the shadow of the stumpy bushes, the dog sitting beside him, the green light of his eyes raised toward the window.

I have never been able to forget the feeling that came over me then—a feeling inside me as though something cowered and shivered. There was about the pair of them an indescribable air of menace that held me like an insect on a pin. And it was a menace that you couldn't meet with bluster and a gun—they did not mean to burgle the house—that was not their purpose. I don't know how long I stood there, with uncontrollable shivers creeping on my flesh, but at last I was able to wrench myself away. I pulled down the shade and stumbled through the blackness of the room to the lamp. As the light went on again, the cold wicked howling of the dog started up once more. I looked at Paul on the bed; he slept deeply without stirring.

I locked both our doors that opened into the hall, and moved a chair so that I had a view of his room through the open communicating door, and would be able to see him if he attempted to get up. At least they don't seem able to get into the house, I thought; that's a good thing. When I lighted a cigarette, I saw that my fingers were shaking. I sat there, smoking many cigarettes, listening to the howling of the dog. It stopped at the first streak of dawn.

When daylight had begun to pale the lamp, I got up, switched off the light, and raised the shades. Burning-eyed, stiff and tired, I looked out at a clear bright day. The snow had ended and the lawn and woods were spread with fresh white. I stared down at the lawn directly beneath the windows.

The light film of snow was smooth and clean; there were no footprints, of either dog or man. But I had not expected there would be.

PAUL looked hazy eyed and weary, and he had eaten only half his breakfast. "Oh, I agree with you—there's no use trying to live in this place any longer." He pushed the plate away irritably. "But I hate to give up my house that I like, just because a couple of miserable shadows—" He rested his head on his hands. "Mary isn't going to enjoy being bundled off again as soon as she gets home."

"She will, after I've talked to her." The phone rang, and I got up to answer it. "I have an idea that the villagers are right, and that when rains fill the reservoir again and cover up the grave, this will be a safe place once more—you can come back then."

"At home, after the rains," he said with a sour grin. "Perhaps."

When I came back to the table, I said, "Listen, Paul, a patient of mine—it sounds like an emergency operation—"

"I heard," he said. "Of course you'll be starting for the city at once—"

"But I don't want to leave you here alone."

"Nothing ever happens in daylight," he said. "Mary will be home about noon, and we'll leave then. I'll have her call you up when we get to the city, so you can reassure her about my sanity." He got up from the table. "Of course you must go, Rob, but you're not to worry about me. I'll be all right."

I stood looking at him doubtfully, torn between two duties. "If you do just as we planned, you *should* be all right—"

He helped me pack my bags, and came out with me to the car. "I hate to scuttle away like a cowardly dog," he said, frowning. "But I don't dare take any risk, with Mary and the children in the house—" He looked about him at the bright pouring sunshine and the crisp snow. "It seems unbelievable."

I knew what he meant—in the sane daylight, what had happened last night seemed night-born, dream-born, not real.

"But you know it isn't," I said, starting the car. "You or Mary call me as soon as you get in."

My last glimpse showed him standing in the doorway, the big house looming behind him as though it were about to swallow him alive. I thought as I drove along that I really should have got a definite promise from him that he would not spend another night in the place—but I was quite sure, remembering his words and the way he loved his family, that he would not dare take such a chance with Mary and the children there, and went on with easier mind.

My patient gave me a desperately anxious day. I took him to the hospital and slept there that night in order to be ready for the early operation; and it was not really until afternoon of the next day when the operation was successfully over and he had come out of the anesthetic, that I seemed to open my eyes and look around again.

Every doctor knows that state of mind when he's engaged in a hand-to-hand battle with death—there simply is no room for anything else. I went home, had my lunch, and sat down for a moment with the afternoon paper.

It was not until that instant that I thought of Paul again. The small headline, sandwiched in between the bursts of war news, leaped out at me: *Paul Crawford Murdered.* The paper shook in my hands, and a shock of horror burst in me like a bomb. I dropped the paper, snatched it up again, and read:

"Paul Crawford, well known modern novelist, author of the best sellers, 'Mrs. Grundy' and 'Strange Voyage,' was found dead today near his home in Covington under circumstances which indicated he had been murdered. The body was found by Mrs. Crawford who had returned from California with her children a day later than she had anticipated—"

Poor Mary, I thought with a choking rush of pity. I knew what had happened. Paul had heard from Mary that she would be a day late, and stubborn, angry at being forced out of his own house, he had determined that he would stay just one more night. Perhaps he had locked all the doors, all the windows, perhaps he had done other things that he thought would keep him safe from things that walk in the dark, but nothing had been enough. I stared down again at the clear black print of the paper.

"Mr. Crawford's body lay at a junction of old Revolutionary roads which had been revealed by the drying up of Covington Reservoir in the recent drought. The body had been badly mauled by a wild animal, although none have been known to be in the vicinity in years. The case is further complicated by the fact that about Mr. Crawford's neck was a rope of a type said to have been used for the execution of criminals generations ago The inquest will be held on Wednesday morning at ten o'clock."

I knew what the result of the inquest would be, almost as though I were there to hear the foreman of the jury say, "We find the deceased met his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

But they were known to me.

THE SHAPE OF THRILLS TO COME

Peer into the future with us for a few minutes—and take a look at what is coming in the next

WEIRD TALES

Trees that *Suffer* the *Torments* of the *Damned*— Find a Champion in "THE MAN WHO LOVED PLANKS"

Malcolm Jameson

Crack fantasy author Malcolm Jameson creates a character who crusades in the cause of tortured forest dryads the souls of trees. This strange man spends years piecing together three dimensional super jig-saw puzzles, feminine beings who for centuries have stayed alive—a hand in one city, a foot in another, the head on another continent! Written by one of America's front rank fictioneers, "THE MAN WHO LOVED PLANKS" is fantasy that's definitely different.

•

"THE AFFAIR OF THE SHUT EYE MEDIUM," by H. Bedford-Jones, is another of the Adventures of a Professional Corpse—this time an excursion into the spirit world!

•

DO YOU "WAKE AND REMEMBER"?

Seabury Quinn

When you meet a total stranger don't you sometimes get the feeling you've met him or her before some place, although you *know* it's impossible? Maybe you knew each other in a former life. . . . Such a feeling came to Mehitabel Goodrich when she peered through the peephole of the door that barred the young man's room, and it seemed as though a breeze laden with memories blew over her.

We promise you a selection of tales from the work of your favorite writers. Such top of the ladder favorites as: Robert Bloch, Thorpe McClusky, Dorothy Quick, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, Thomas P. Kelley, and many others.

Seabury Quinn's "WAKE AND REMEMBER" is drama that might have happened to you—that *may* happen to you!

•

The March Issue will be on sale At Your Newsstand on January 1st.

Two Shall be Born

By SEABURY QUINN

For thirteen centuries she had lain there, mimicing life—counterfeiting sleep.

Two shall be born the whole wide world apart
And speak in different tongues and have no thought
Each of the other's being and no heed . . .
That some day out of darkness they shall meet
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes.
—Susan Marr Spaulding, *Fate.*

COLD weather had set in, and the quiet street was like a scene from a Christmas card in the November dusk. The moon was very bright; its radiance was powdered silver on the frost-encrusted grass. Soft light filtered through drawn curtains on the neatly-kept front lawns. Somewhere down the block a window had been left open and through it, very clear in the cool tranquil air, a radio picked up a broadcast from Havana, mandolins and violins mourning softly over a tango. The placid beauty of the night was like the sting of salt in a raw wound to Fullerton. "A sorrow's crown of sorrows," he repeated bitterly, "is remembering happier things." Yet what was there to do but remember? Life was flowing backward for him, there was nothing in the future save, perhaps, such patience as a living dead man might command while he waited the actual sundering of flesh and spirit.

For Henry Herbert Fullerton—"H.H.F." beloved of the sports writers and one-time All American left tackle, later South American explorer and still later stock broker—was dead. Not dead the way you were when skilled morticians gave death the appearance of a natural sleep and clergymen droned prayers above you and women wept while soft music was played. Oh, no, not that—the lucky ones died that way! He was just civilly dead—*civiliter mortuus*—a legal corpse, deprived of all the rights of manhood till the state saw fit to restore them. An ex-convict.

Like one who sees a motion picture reeled through its projector in reverse he viewed the incidents that marked the past twelve years. His return from the exploring trip, the offer of the partnership in Smathers, Dirk & Houghton, his partners' endless importunities to bring his friends in on "good things"; his marriage to Millicent with the church banked suffocatingly high with flowers and gawking crowds held back by the police escort. Later, their duplex apartment and the cocktail parties that they threw; whispered market tips and eager friends with avid eyes who fairly forced their money on him. Then October, 1929, the crash, the realization that his trustful friends were ruined, the all-night drinking bout at Gilotti's speakeasy, and the return to his house just in time to meet Millicent and Bob Houghton at the door.

They had laughed at his befuddled questions, made a mock of his remonstrances. "Hold the bag, sucker," Bob had flung across his shoulder as he helped Millicent into the car.

Hold the bag, eh? They'd run out on him, leaving him to face the music, would they? He'd show 'em! When the police picked Bob Houghton up there were four bullet wounds in him, each of which would have been fatal. Not bad shooting for a drunken man. And Millicent

"You're overdue in hell a thousand years." 105

was screaming at him, mouthing curses like a fish-wife.

His lawyers pleaded the unwritten law, his drunkenness, finally advised a plea of guilty in the second degree.

Ten years the judge had said. Ten years at hard labor. And the warden took him at his word. No office work, no soft duties for this killer who but for wealth and influence might be waiting for the final summons from the death house. The rock pile, the machine shop and the laundry, these were his portion while the sands of time piled slowly to a pyramid of ten long years. Then they set him free, a ticket to the city in the pocket of his prison-made ill-fitting suit, and the mark of the ex-convict on him. A slight, lean man of thirty-six who looked fifty, gaunt-featured, pewter haired, with the empty, lusterless eyes of a dead man walking.

Millicent had divorced him. Served the papers on him in the penitentiary. With a grim smile he recalled her accusations, "—assault with a deadly weapon—conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude—" He let the case go by default. Everything she said was true. Once he had tried to kill her; he loved her then, loved her so he'd rather see her dead than gone with Bob Houghton. No matter now. When one is quits with life what difference does it make whether he is married or divorced?

He'd seen her yesterday down on the Avenue, gray eyes aglint beneath the crisping curls of auburn hair, a smart small hat trimmed with cock feathers, a double cross fox scarf draped negligently across her shoulders. She'd passed him by as if he were a bit of wind-blown street-trash, and he had wondered idly that the sight of her stirred neither longing nor resentment in him, that he could look so calmly in that coldly lovely face and feel no quickening of the pulses as he passed within hand's reach of this woman who had vowed to cleave to him through sorrow and adversity while they both lived.

"But," he reflected bitterly, "she kept her bargain. One of us is dead; dead legally—*civiliter mortuus*."

THE moonlight glinted on a spot of brightness in the walk before his house, and Fullerton grinned as he marked it. His neighbor up the street, the small dark man who'd moved into the vacant house three doors away, had put that bright tile in his sidewalk the same day he took possession of the premises. Fullerton had noticed it as he went out upon his daily morning walk, a square of brightly finished porcelain, not white nor yet quite green, but a sort of combination of the two, noticeable in the dull-gray of the paving blocks as a cardinal in a flock of blackbirds. It had a figure on it, too, a man with a jackal's head, like the figures of Anubis he'd seen in the museums. Odd that he should have set a bright tile like that in the gray-stone walk. But then—

Last night was Halloween, and boys in South Brooklyn were like their kind the world over. Out ringing doorbells, stealing trash-cans, blowing beans at unprotected windows. Among their pranks had been the transplantation of the bright tile from his neighbor's walk to his. Tomorrow he must take it back. Only the diffidence that made him shrink from meeting people had kept him from restoring it that morning.

He put his hand up to the curtain cord, but delayed pulling it. Freedom to open or shut doors and windows was still a luxury to be savored. "Old Lovelace hadn't served a hitch in the big house when he wrote

> 'Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage.'"

he said ironically, speaking naturally to himself, as lonely men have done since

time's beginning. "If he had—what the deuce?" He ended on an interrogatively rising note as a light delivery van crawled down the street, the driver leaning far out of the cab to scan the sidewalks bordering the roadway.

Opposite his door the car came to a halt, and the driver jumped down, crossed the strip of parking and bent down to examine the bright tile. Satisfied with his inspection, apparently, he called to his helper, and walked back to the vehicle, where he began to unlatch the chains holding up its tail gate. In a moment they had drawn out a long packing case and were lugging it up his walk.

"You must have made a mistake," Fullerton insisted as they beat upon his front door with a thunderous knock. "I haven't ordered anything—who's this for?"

The driver and his helper had regained their seats in the car, and looked back at him surlily. "For a man," replied the driver. "See?"

"No, I don't. What's his name and address?"

"Dunno, Mister. Our orders wuz to put that box down at th' door o' th' house wid a fancy tile in its front walk. Didn't have no name or number; just a house in dis block wid a fancy tile. If you ain't th' party it's just too bad, for we ain't luggin' that crate back. See?"

With a wheeze and rattle the old car got underway, and Fullerton was left with the unwanted parcel on his doorstep.

"Now what?" he asked himself. The box was oblong, made of light wood strips reinforced with cross-tied ropes. There was nothing on it to identify its consignee or consignor. In shape and size it was much like the rough box used to encase the casket at burial. Fullerton felt a slight chill of apprehension as he looked at it. What was he to do with it? The driver had said it was for the man with the bright tile in his sidewalk. That would be his new neighbor. Obviously the thing was too heavy for him to move it unassisted—"But I can't leave it out here all night," he told himself, "it may hold perishable goods." Tentatively he leaned down and took the nearer corners in his hands. Surprisingly, the case moved toward him easily, and he realized it had castors fitted to its lower surface. That simplified things.

Pulling, tugging, panting a little from the exertion, he drew the box across the doorsill and into the front hall. There, it would be safe till morning—

Shoving it with his foot to make a clearance way for the front door, he was astonished at the ease with which it rolled across the polished floor. Not only rolled, but cannoned into the newel post of the staircase. The crackling sound of breaking wood was followed by the tinkle of smashing earthenware, and he looked ruefully at the object exposed by the shattered crate.

Where the box had staved in he could glimpse a dull-white surface scarred by a wide crack. It was hard to make the object out. From its shape it might have been a bathtub, but who'd make a bathtub out of fragile earthenware, or encase it in a box unable to withstand a slight jar such as that which smashed this case?

"H'm, maybe I can fix the thing," he muttered, putting back the broken boards. "Perhaps I'd better not try, but—" He couldn't understand it, but a curiosity greater than his powers of resistance seemed to prompt him. Plainly as if he'd heard the words pronounced he became aware that the box held something he must see—quickly.

He drew the boards away, looked down at the baked-clay case they had concealed. Six feet in length it was, and in general appearance it resembled one of those old covered soap-dishes without which no

toilet set of the late nineties was complete. The top was slightly convex and seemed joined to the bottom by a tongue-and-groove joint into which some sort of plaster had been set. An inch or so below the junction of the top and body ran a border of the egg-and-dart design familiar to Greek pottery of the common sort. The whole appeared to have been baked in a brick-kiln, but not thoroughly, for in several places the rough finish had chipped off, leaving pits and indentations on the surface, as though the baking process had added more of brittleness than strength to the clay.

With his knife he dug away the soft cement that sealed the vessel. In a moment he had loosened it and lifted back the top. "Good Lord, what's this?"

THE light from the hall chandelier shone past him into the clay casket, and as he looked into the cavernous container he felt the breath hit hard against his teeth while a jerking, pounding feeling came into his chest beneath the curve of his left collar-bone. He was looking full into the still calm face of a dead woman.

Carefully, stepping softly with that reverence which is the instinctive due of death, he stood the casket cover in the angle of the wall and looked again into the terra-cotta coffin. If what he saw was death it was a startling counterfeit of life.

She lay as easily and naturally in her clay coffin as though she slept in her accustomed bed. Tall she was and slender, perfectly proportioned as a statue wrought by Phidias or Praxiteles, golden-haired and fair-skinned as a Nordic blonde. From tapering white throat to slender chalk-white ankles she was draped in a white robe, the simple Ionic *chiton* of white linen cut in that austerely modest style of ancient Greece in which the upper portion of the dress falls downward again from neck to waist to form a sort of cape, masking the outline of the bosom and leaving the entire arms and points of the shoulders bare. Save for the tiny studs of hand-wrought gold which held the gown together at the shoulders and the narrow double line of horizontal purple stripes at the bottom of the cape her dress was without ornament of any sort. There were no rings upon the long slim fingers of the narrow hands that lay demurely crossed upon her breast, her narrow, high-arched feet were bare. A corded fillet of white linen bound her bright hair in a Psyche knot.

For a moment—or an hour, he had no way of telling, for time seemed pausing, and breathing with it—he stood looking at the lovely body coffined in the baked-clay casket. Like every normal layman he had an inborn horror of death, and instinctively felt frightened in the presence of the dead, but, somehow, this did not seem death.

It was, rather, the image of slumber, of live unconscious, waiting to be waked.

Yet, despite appearances, he knew that she was dead, and had been for a thousand years and more. He had seen coffins like the one she lay in at the museums. Explorers' spades had dug them from the Christian cemetery at Alexandria, relics of the vanished Roman Empire of the East. He recognized her simple, graceful costume, too. The narrow stripes of Tyrian dye that edged her cape bore witness to her status as a freeborn Roman citizen, the corded girdle at her waist proclaimed her a virgin. She must have lived—and died—before the rise of Islam in the Seventh Century.

Yet though she must have passed from life to death twelve hundred and more years ago so perfect was the mimicry of life, so absolute the counterfeit of breath-

ing sleep, that he was afraid to move lest he waken her.

Gradually his reason reasserted itself. The old Egyptians had been skilled embalmers; he'd heard it said they knew a process whereby all appearance of mortality could be removed; not the crude pickling of mummification, but a technique which approached that practiced by embalmers of our day. Yet look as he would he could find no sign of the embalmer's work, no wound, no slit in the smooth skin, no scar or bandage.

Reverently he bent above the dead form in the coffin. Beside the body, almost hidden by a fold of the white robe, he saw a roll of something which appeared like parchment, and bending closer he could make out letters on it. This might give a clue to her identity and explain her marvelous defiance of the natural law of dissolution.

The rolled screed crackled in his hands. It was not parchment, he discerned, but something thin and almost transparent, like row on row of library mending tissue joined skillfully together. He recognized it, he had seen its like in the museums—papyrus.

The writing on it was in square black letters strung together without break, as if the whole message were one long word. "What language?" he wondered, looking idly at the characters. Egyptian? Not likely, they used picture-writing. Greek? Perhaps, but the letters didn't look like Grecian characters. He ran his eye along the topmost line:

NOVERINTUNIVERSIPERBREVIA.

"Gibberish!" he told himself disgustedly, then checked in mid-breath. No! The characters were Roman capitals, like the numerals on his watch, and suddenly he recalled having heard that it was not until comparatively recent days that words were written separately for convenience in reading.

Here was a clue. He hadn't looked inside a Latin book in almost twenty years, but— Frowning with the effort, he bent his gaze upon the opening letters of the message:

NOV—that might be an abbreviation for *nova,* signifying new, but that would make the next word *erin.* There wasn't any such word he remembered. Still—

Suddenly, as a figure hidden in a picture-puzzle becomes clear when it has been stared at fixedly for a time, the first sixteen letters of the line seemed to separate. There they were, in two words:

NOVERINT — UNIVERSI — Know everyone, know all men—

And the next three characters spelled P-E-R—*per,* meaning by—

Then BREVIA—these writs, these writings—

He was making progress now. It would be a long task, but the thing could be deciphered and translated. Plainly it was in the nature of a legal document, perhaps a statement of the dead girl's name and parentage.

For the first time in more than ten years he smiled with eyes as well as lips. "I'll know more about you in a little while, my dear," he told her in a whisper. Then, even lower: "Sleep on, and pleasant dreams."

IT WAS almost morning when he leaned back from his desk, utterly worn out with unaccustomed work, but too astounded to be conscious of fatigue. Crumpled paper lay about him on the floor, the ashtray was piled high with cigarette stubs, but on the desk lay his translation completed:

Know all to whom these writings come that I, known to the Greeks as Philamon, but to my fellow-followers of the Old Gods' worship

as Harmichis, being of the olden blood of mighty Egypt and a sworn priest of the Old Gods, have caused the virgin Helena to fall into a deep sleep by the arts of my learning, wherefrom she shall not waken till one takes her by the hand and calls her name and bids her rise.

Now to whosoever sees these writings, greetings and admonition: It is my purpose to assume a like sleep unto hers when I have finished preparations for her safekeeping, and for mine own. But haply it may fall out that we wake in divers places, and that another than myself shall summon her from sleep. Now, therefore, stranger, be ye warned. The virgin Helena is mine, and not another's, and should thou come upon her sleeping in her coffin, thou art charged to leave her as thou findest her, for if she waken at thy bidding. and looketh on thee with favor, know that I, Harmichis, servant of the Most High Gods, and a mighty man in combat, will seek thee out and do thee mortal battle for her, and as for her, should she look on another with the eyes of love, then she shall truly die by my hand, and not awaken any more, either at the bidding of a mortal man or otherwise, for bodiless and without hope of resurrection shall she wander in Amenti forever. I have said.

The more he read the document the crazier it sounded, and, paradoxically, the crazier it sounded the more logical it seemed. His recollection of the history of the Roman Empire of the East was sketchy, but he remembered having heard that the old faith was kept alive by Coptic descendants of the original Egyptians, and that even today there are men who claim to have been initiated into the mysteries of Osiris and the lesser gods of Egypt. It seemed quite possible that this man who called himself Harmichis might have been a member of the old priesthood. There was small doubt that the Egyptian priests understood hypnotism, just as the Hindus did. That would account for the assertion that Harmichis "caused the virgin Helena to fall into a deep sleep by the arts of his learning."

Evidently this had been some sort of ancient version of a lovers' suicide pact. Harmichis, unable to marry the Greek girl, had hypnotized her—put her in a state of suspended animation—coffined her and had her buried in the desert sands. He had then intended to hypnotize himself, or have another do it to him and be buried by her side. Then at some predetermined time he would awaken, issue from his grave and rouse the sleeping maiden. "And just in case somebody beat him to it, he gave 'em timely warning to lay off," Fullerton ended aloud.

He lighted a fresh cigarette and bowed his head in thought. How long had the hypnotic sleep lasted? How long does it take for a hypnotically induced trance to become true death? Obviously she had not wakened in her coffin. There was no sign of a struggle. Quite as obviously she had not died of slow starvation while in a cataleptic state. She was slender, but with the slenderness of youthful grace, not the emaciation of starvation.

He shook his head and rose. If only what old Harmichis had wished were possible—if only he could take her by the hand and call on her to waken—

Once more he stood above the terra-cotta coffin, looking in the dead girl's calm sweet face. Good Lord, but she was beautiful! Her smoothly-flowing contours melted into lines of perfect symmetry, dark lashes swept the pure curve of her cheeks, her lips, still faintly stained with color, rested softly on each other. Unbidden, a verse from *Romeo and Juliet* came to his mind:

> Beauty's ensign yet
> Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
> And death's pale flag is not advanced there.

Scarcely realizing what he did he bent down and laid his fingers on one of the slim pale hands resting on the dead girl's breast. He recoiled in surprise. The hand was warm as living flesh, firm and lovely to the touch.

"All right," he murmured argumentatively to himself. "I'm crazy. So what? I'm going to try it, anyway."

How did you say "arise" in Latin? He thought a moment, then, his hand upon the girl's, his lips almost against the little low-set ear that lay framed in a nest of glowing gold-bright curls: *"Serge, O Helena!"* He wasn't quite sure that was right. Perhaps he should have said, *"Serge tu,"* but . . . *"O Helena, serge!"* he repeated, louder this time.

A chill, not quite of fear nor yet of pure excitement, but rather from a combination of them, rippled through him, for with the repetition of the command the fingers in his stirred, curled up to take a light hold on his hand, and the bosom of the dead girl heaved as if in respiration. The waxen-smooth blue-veined eyelids were lifted slowly from a pair of almost golden eyes, and a faint suggestion of color swept upward through her throat and cheeks like a blush. Her calm lips parted, trembled in a broken little sigh.

She met his startled gaze with a long look of gentle trust. "Is it truly thou, my lord?" she asked in a soft whisper.

He looked down at her raptly, like a worshipper before a shrine, or a child to whom a glimpse of fairyland has been vouchsafed. Involuntarily he leaned toward her. The attraction was instinctive, elemental, unreasoning as the drifting down of autumn leaves which take their flight without consideration or knowledge of the botanical process involved. For a long, heart-stilling moment they looked into each other's eyes, and as he looked at her he felt the shell of rage and hatred for the world and all mankind which he had kept about him for the last ten years begin to soften like a frozen river in the first spring sunshine.

"Helena!" he breathed almost inaudibly.

Her steadfast eyes were wide, star-bright with tears that came unbidden to their black-lashed lids, and her lips were trembling like an eager child's. "Is it truly thou, my lord?" she asked again.

HELL-BROTH simmered to a boil in Alexandria. It was the summer of the year 635, and everywhere within the ancient city of the Ptolemies dissention reigned. Fanatic monks and deacons of the orthodox religion mobbed heretics of the old Coptic Church. Copts burned the orthodox churches, and murdered monks and priests at every opportunity. From the ghetto where almost a hundred thousand Jews were barred in by intolerance of Greek and Copt there issued almost nightly raiding parties to avenge the insults heaped upon the Sons of Israel by daylight. The Roman governor hanged and crucified adherents to all parties with a fine impartiality, and confiscated lands and goods with even greater readiness. From the East came ominous reports of Islam's onward march; some said that Amrou, general of the Caliph Omar's Syrian armies, had already laid siege to Pelusium, guardian fortress of the boundary.

In an upper chamber of her father's house in the Museum Street the damsel Helena was seated, reading from a vellum scroll the romance of Hero and Leander. Of late there had been little else that she could do. Most of the city's four hundred theatres were closed by order of the governor, for wherever crowds assembled rioting was sure to follow. The streets and squares re-echoed to the march of mailed *protectorii*—soldiers of the Roman garrison—the baths no longer afforded a com-

fortable haven for exchange of friendly gossip.

"' . . . yonder shines the blessèd light,
Love-kindled to dispel the night
And lead me, Hero mine, to thee,"

she read, her lips half forming the words as her eyes traced down the lines of boldly-formed Greek letters. "Yes, Judith?" she looked up as a small Negro maid paused at the door with a deep bow.

"If it please your ladyship the Copt Philamon waits below, and begs an audience."

Helena's smooth brow wrinkled in a frown. "Bid him begone," she answered. "Tell him I am at the bath, or in the theatre—"

"I have, your ladyship, but still he lingers obstinately, saying he will wait until it pleases you to see him."

"Does he, in very truth? Why, then, 'twere better that I saw him quickly and dispatched the business for all time. Bring him hither, slave."

As the serving wench went on her errand Helena laid by her parchment and glanced toward the door with a small frown of annoyance between her classic level brows. Philamon—she had no wish to see him now or ever, yet for old time's sake she'd try to be as gentle as she might. They had been schoolmates and playfellows, though she was the daughter of a philospher attached to the Museum and he the son of a rich Coptic merchant. Ostensibly he was a Christian, and bore the Greek name of Philamon, but as he grew from youth to manhood he had joined with others of his race in an attempt to revive worship of the ancient deities of Egypt. Until they had expelled him from the lecture halls of the Museum he had the impudence to preach the godhead of Osiris. Now, grown to man's estate, he presumed to sue for her hand—insolent desert-spawn, to aspire to the hand of one in whose veins ran the noblest blood of the Empire. The tinkling of the small bells on the silken curtain at the door cut short her reverie, and Philamon entered with a deep obeisance.

He was a handsome young man, dark, slender, lithe and almost silent as a snake in his movements. Above a tunic of deep Tyrian purple edged with gold embroidery he wore a light cape of green silk. A jeweled girdle with a dagger hanging from it in a sheath of gem-encrusted leather clasped his waist, buskins of white leather worked with gold were on his feet. His curling black hair was encircled by a golden fillet.

"*Salve, Helena,*" he greeted, dropping naturally into the classic Latin which, as a Copt, he preferred to the Greek spoken by the ruling class "*Dominus tecum.*"

"Hast thou then become a Christian—again?" she asked with a faint sneer. "I had not thought to hear thee say—"

He cut her short with an impatient gesture. "There is no time to bandy words, my Helena. Knowest thou the latest tidings from the East?"

"What should a Grecian maiden know of them? Am I a Coptic traitor, having secret messages from spies—"

Once more his lifted hand broke through her bitter words. "Pelusium has been taken by Amrou. The path to Alexandria lies open to the hosts of Islam. Within the month the Caliph's soldiers will have ringed the city's walls with steel."

Now genuine alarm showed in her face. "The governor—"

"The governor? *Pah!*" He spat the exclamation out as though it were an epithet. "What can he do? The Roman soldiery is soft with too much wine and food, too little war. The Gothic mercenaries are besotted with their wine and dice and wenches, and would set sail for Europe ere

the first assault. There is not a single legion in the field against the hordes of Amrou's Arab cavalry, and every day fresh troops of Saracens come up from Syria. There is no help or hope for it. The Alexandrian garrison is doomed."

"Then—then what shall I do?" she faltered.

HE SMILED. Not pleasantly. "Hear me, O Helena. Aforetime I have offered you my hand, but you have refused—reviled—me. Now once more I make you offer of an honorable marriage and a fortune which shall be secure from seizure by the Arabs. They have promised all us Copts immunity if we will join with them against the Greeks. I shall have high place and rank and power in the government of the Caliph. Which will you choose, O Helena, my name and love and fortune, or exile and poverty at the court of Heraclius? Philosophers are very plentiful in Byzantium. Thy father's learning will command small recompense."

Not for a moment did she doubt him. He was a traitor to the Empire, an apostate Christian, a conspirator, but no liar. In an agony of apprehension her fingers twisted and untwisted themselves. There was about her the appearance of a frightened child. "But I do not love thee, Philamon—"

"No more Philamon; I have done with all things Greek," he interrupted. "Call me by my rightful name, Harmichis."

She went on as if he had not spoken: "To wed a man not loving him—"

Once more he cut her short. "See, Helena, here is a window to the future. Look into it and tell me what thou see'st." From the pocket hanging at his girdle he produced a globe of rock-crystal somewhat larger than an orange and laid it on the table before her. "Look, look into it, my Helena, and see if thou wilt choose to be my mate, or brave the future unprotected!"

Timorously she bent forward, looking into the cool limpid depth of the glass ball. His eyes, hot; greedy, coal-black, were upon her, his sharp-cut lips were whispering insistently, "Look—look! Look through the window of the future, Helena—"

At first she saw no more than vague prysmatic mirrorings of the room, such as might have been reflected in a floating soap-bubble, but gradually the crystal clouded, shading from the clarity of water to the opalescence of fresh milk, then darkening steadily, appeared to grow jet-black, as if it were a sphere of polished ebony. A point of light appeared against the brilliant blackness, another, and another.

Now they were whirling round each other, like torches carried by wild-leaping dancers viewed from a tower top at night, and gradually they seemed to form a pattern. In their merging brightness she could decry figures—she saw the wild charge of the Arab cavalry, saw the Imperial legions staggering from the battlefield; beheld the great siege-engines set up under Alexandria's walls, and saw the Saracens come swarming up the battlements to cut down every living thing that barred their wild, victorious advance.

"Oh—horrible!" she faltered, and tried to wrench her gaze away from the bright sphere, but a power greater than her own will held her fascinated eyes upon it. A light, bright mist, an endless network of converging lines seemed taking form in the crystal. In its depths, as through a dim, wiped-over window, she beheld herself asleep. Asleep? No, never maiden slept in such a bed as that, save in the last long sleep that knows no waking. It was a coffin that she lay in, and they had taken all her jewelry off, slipped the bright emeralds from her ears, drawn the rings from her fingers, even taken off her gold-embroidered sandals. Dead. She, Helena.

was dead, and about to be buried like a beggar maid.

But what was this? Above the coffin which enclosed her bent a face. She did not recognize it, for the features differed from the features of the men she knew. It was finely drawn with rather high cheek-bones, the mouth was wide and generous, the eyes a pale and smoky gray. Hardened by suffering it was, and scarred by the deep acid-cuts of cynicism, but instinctively she felt drawn to it, for she knew that it belonged to one who had an infinite capacity for love and kindness—and infinite need of them.

"Art thou—art thou to be my lord?" she asked tremulously. "Art thou he into whose hands I shall lay my heart like a gift—"

Harsh and dry and rasping with cold fury Harmichis' voice drowned out her timid question:

"Sleep, Helena. Fall thou in a deep and dreamless sleep which men shall take for death, and wake no more until thy hand be taken and thy name called—"

FOUR oxen, white and without blemish, drew the funeral car that held Helena's coffin from the Church of Holy Wisdom to the great Necropolis where Christian dead were buried. Two dozen lovely maidens robed in white and veiled with purple walked barefoot in the dust beside the flower-burdened hearse, with the Patriarch of Alexandria and his train of deacons and subdeacons following in their gilded curricles drawn by white mules. At the grave the girls wailed piercingly and tore their faces with their nails, then cut their long hair off and threw the braided tresses on the coffin. With incense, bell and intoned prayer the churchmen laid her in the grave and went their several ways.

The burying ground lay silent in the fading moonlight. A soft low haze that swept up from the harbor shrouded tree and monument and mausoleum in a silvery unreal half-light as Harmichis and the two stout knaves he had picked up on the waterfront crept silently as wind-blown clouds across the broad lawns of the great Necropolis. "Dig here," Harmichis ordered, and at his command the villains turned the loose turf back.

The ornate coffin, ornamented with a frieze depicting scenes from the life of Saint Helena, lay but a foot or two beneath the sod. In fifteen minutes it was hoisted from the grave, its sealings of lime-mortar broken, and the lovely corpse exposed.

Working quickly, Harmichis undid the emerald rings from Helena's small ears, drew the jeweled rings from her fingers, unclasped the brooch that held the Persian shawl about her shoulders, unlaced the gold-embroidered buskins on her feet. "Take them," he tossed the loot to his helpers. "Their price will buy a jar of wine in any shop along the quay." Then, as the scoundrels pocketed the finery, "Bring on the other coffin."

It was a plain, cheap case of half-baked earthenware they lugged from the cart hitched beside the road, the sort of casket used by those just rich enough to bury their dead chested, but too poor to afford any but the meanest funeral furnishings. Into it they put Helena, then dropped it in the place of her elaborate casket, and heaped the broken earth upon it.

"Break this up and throw the pieces in the harbor," Harmichis ordered as he gave the fine coffin a kick. "Here is the balance of thy hire." He tossed a purse to them and turned away. Chuckling, he murmured to himself, "No grave robber will seek for buried treasure in that pauper's coffin. Sleep on my Helena; sleep on in blessèd poverty until—"

Half an hour later he was in his own bed chamber. His Grecian clothes were laid aside and in their place he wore a

gown of plain white linen, such as that the priests vowed to Osiris wore in days before the coming of the Greeks and Romans. Before him on the table lay the crystal ball which he had used to hypnotize the girl.

"Gaze, gaze, Harmichis," he bade himself. "Gaze, servant of the Most High Gods, gaze in the magic crystal, yield up thy being and sink thou in a sleep so deep that men shall take it for death till—" His voice failed slowly, sinking from a murmur to a whisper, finally to silence. His head fell forward on his arms—

The news that Philamon the Copt had died of grief for Helena the Greek girl spread through the city. His funeral was a simple one, for neither Greek nor Coptic priest would say a prayer for one who had admitted publicly he was apostate, a follower of the old gods.

Nevertheless, because he had been rich, and because his will requested it, they dug his grave a little distance from the grave where Helena the Christian maiden had been laid.

"ART thou truly he whom I did see aforetime in the gazing-crystal of the renegade Philamon?" the girl asked Fullerton, her golden eyes fixed questioningly on him.

He was suddenly aware that she did not speak English—but that he understood her perfectly.

"Of—of course, it's I," he answered stammeringly, "but—" in his excitement he let go her hand, and instantly her look of rapt attention changed to one of mild bewilderment. She said something in reply. Her words were musically soft and liquid, but what she said he no more understood than if she'd spoken in Chinese.

"May I help you?" he put out his hand again, and she laid hers in it with the air of a princess bestowing a rare gift. Like a radio dialed suddenly from a foreign to a local broadcast, her words became intelligible in mid-syllable.

"—and Philamon — Harmichis — shall not have me?"

"He certainly shall not," he answered positively. "Neither he nor anyone, unless you wish—"

He stood away from her as he spoke, and once again he saw the puzzled look come in her eyes. She could not understand a syllable he pronounced.

Then understanding came to him. He could not explain it, but he knew. While they were standing hand in hand, or even when they touched each other lightly, everything one said was perfectly intelligible to the other. The moment they broke contact each was walled off from the other by the barrier of alien speech.

The maid had laid a fire before she left that evening, and in a moment he had kindled it. Then hand in hand they sat before the blazing logs and talked, and understood each other in that mystic communion which seemed to come to them when they made bodily contact. With only a few prompting questions she related her last day in Alexandria, told how Harmichis had bidden her look in the crystal— "The Saracens did not prevail against the soldiers of the Emperor, did they, my lord?" she broke off to ask him tremulously.

He took a deep breath. How could he tell her? But: "More than a thousand years ago, child," he answered.

"A thousand years—" Her eyes came up to his from under the deep shadow of their curling lashes. "Then I am—"

It was hard for him to explain, but adding what she'd told him to the information gleaned from the papyrus he could piece her history together. When he had done she bent her head in thought a moment. Finally she turned to him, eyes wide, lips parted. Her breath was coming faster. "I mind me that in that far

day from which I come men sometimes found the mummies of the ancient ones in the rock tombs," she whispered.

"They're still doing it," he answered with a smile. "The mummies of Rameses and Tutankhamen are in museums—"

She nodded understandingly and he saw the pupils of her golden eyes swell and expand, darkening the bright irises. "To whom do they belong, those bodies salvaged from the past?" she interrupted.

"Why—to whoever finds them, I suppose," he rejoined, a little puzzled by her agitation.

"They are the things and chattels of their finders?" she persisted.

"Yes, I suppose you might say that—"

He stopped in utter surprise, for at his words the girl had slipped down from the couch and fallen to her knees before him. Taking his right hand in both of hers she bowed her head submissively and placed his hand upon it. "Full-ah-tohn"—she said his name with difficulty—"behold me, a stranger from another age and place, alone and friendless in a foreign world. Freely, and of mine own will and accord, I give myself into thy ownership, and claim from thee the protection the master owes his slave. Take me, my lord and master; do with me as thou wilt. My life is in thy shadow."

He crushed down a desire to protest, or even show amusement at the drama of her self-surrender. She was a child of ancient days, and slavery was a social institution of her times. "Rise, Helena," he ordered solemnly. "I cannot take thee for my slave—"

Tears started to her lashes and rolled in big, slow drops down her pale cheeks, her lower lip began to tremble as though she were about to cry. "Am I then so favorless in thy sight that thou wilt not have me for thy handmaid, Full-ah-tohn, my lord?" she asked.

"Favorless? Why, child, you're beautiful; you're the loveliest thing I've ever seen—"

She was on the couch beside him now, her little feet tucked under her, one hand in his, the other resting on his arm. "Thou givest me my freedom, lord?" she asked.

"Of course, but—"

"But promise me one thing before I take it," she persisted.

"Why, certainly, if it will make you happier—"

"It will, my lord. 'Twill make me very, very happy. Each day at this same hour promise me thou wilt repeat those words—tell me that I am fair and lovely in thy sight!"

"You must be famished after your long sleep," he answered noncommittally. "Wait here, I'll boil some eggs and make some chocolate."

He was busy in the kitchen a few minutes, but busy as his hands were he was even busier with his thoughts. Here was a complication. This lovely girl who despite the date of her birth was physically no more than two and twenty had been literally dropped on his doorstep. In all the strange new modern world where fate had put her she knew no one but him; she was as utterly his responsibility as if she were a baby—and she had just demanded that he tell her she was beautiful at half-past three each morning.

A clinking sound as of metal striking stone attracted his attention as he bore the tray of food into the living room. Pausing at the front door, he looked out across the lawn.

Sharply defined in the moonlight, a man was working at the bright tile in his sidewalk, forcing it from its place with a light crowbar. As Fullerton's gaze fell on him the man paused in his labor and raised his head.

It was his new neighbor, the man before whose house the tile had been set. A shaft of moonlight striking through the un-

leafed boughs of a tree picked his face out of the shadow as a spotlight shows an actor's features on a darkened stage. It was a handsome face, with features clear-cut as an image on a coin, high cheekbones, a wide and full-lipped mouth and wide, black restless eyes with drooping lids and haughty, high-arched brows. Now it was convulsed in a frown of hot fury. He glared about him with a look of hatred sharp and pitiless as a bared knife, then once more bent to his labor.

Fullerton stepped quickly from the hall into the firelit sanctuary of the living room. There was a chilly feeling at his spine as he drew the curtains tighter over the windows.

He had, too, a curiously unpleasant feeling in the region of his stomach. Distinctly as if he were hearing them pronounced, he recalled the warning of the papyrus:

"—if she waketh at thy bidding and looketh on thee with favor, know that I, Harmichis, servant of the Most High Gods of olden Egypt, will do thee battle for her." She had wakened at his bidding —did she look on him with favor? And if she did— He put the thought away deliberately, and placed the eggs and chocolate on the coffee table before her.

FITTING Helena into the modern scene was something of a problem at first. It was impossible to take her shopping in a costume which essentially was like a modern nightrobe, but Fullerton was equal to the emergency. He had her stand on sheets of paper and with a pencil traced the outlines of her feet. With these, and the help of an obliging saleswoman, he bought her a pair of shoes and stockings to accompany them. While she remained indoors enveloped in his bathrobe he took her *chiton* to a shop and bought a dress and cloak from its measurements. Thus clothed she sallied out with him, and for the first time in his life he understood why women love to shop.

The classic vogue in women's styles seemed to have been created for her benefit, she wore the latest modes as if they had been planned for her.

When the fashionable *coiffeur* put his shears to her knee-length hair she cried out as if he had cut her flesh with the keen steel, but when the process was completed and she emerged from the booth with her amber-blond hair waved up from neck and temples and a nest of curls massed high on her head she surveyed her image in the mirror with a gurgle of wide-eyed delight. "I did not think I was so beautiful," she confided to him. "Art sure"—she eyed him archly—"art sure thou wilt not reconsider and hold me to the offer which I made thee on the night thou wakened me?"

"What offer?" he asked, purposely obtuse.

She took his hand in hers and raised it. For the barest fraction of a second his palm brushed the bright curls that clustered like a crown upon her head. "If thou should wish to change thy mind—" she began. Then a salesgirl came with an armful of dresses, and the sudden tenseness which had gripped his heart as if it were a giant hand relaxed.

It was almost incredible how quickly she learned English, and how readily she fitted into modern life. Eating with a knife and fork at first gave her a little trouble, she was superstitiously afraid of taxicabs and subways at first, and her first trip in an elevator terrified her almost to the point of swooning, but within a month she might have been mistaken for one of the season's crop of débutantes.

The change in him was almost noticeable as the transformation in her. The icy shell of rage and hatred which he had worn round him for the past ten years began to melt away as he found new

interest in life. They went everywhere—did everything—together. To watch the changes in her face while they were at the opera or the play, to see the smiles break through the statuesque calm of her classic features when he introduced her to a new experience—the movies, a new food, horseback riding, skating on the frozen lake in Prospect Park, skiing in the Adirondacks—these things gave him pleasure of a sort he had not thought to know again. He and Millicent had never had much common interest. To Helena he was the sun around which all the worlds revolved. She looked to him for advice, guidance and protection. The feeling he was indispensable to someone gave him a new grip on life. He went to see his lawyers and had them prepare a petition to restore his civil rights. As soon as he was no longer a legal corpse he would initiate adoption proceedings. Helena—his daughter.

One of his first moves was to give up the house in South Brooklyn and take a new place on the Heights where they could look across the bay at the tall spires of Manhattan, bright with sunlight in the daytime, jewel-dotted with the glow of countless lighted windows after dark.

One April morning he drove through the block where he had lived when Helena was brought to him. His house was still vacant. FOR RENT signs hung in the windows. Three doors farther down the street he stopped his car and looked down at the sidewalk. The bright tile still twinkled amid the gray paving-blocks. "Too bad, old chap," he chuckled as he set the car in motion, "but there's no use keeping that thing there. Your date with Helena is off. But definitely."

A curtain stirred at a front window as he spoke, and for a second he glimpsed a face peering from the darkened house. It was the same face he had seen in the moonlight the night Helena came to him, but changed. Now it was like a skull that had been lightly fleshed over, a dead-white face with a blue growth of beard on cheek and chin, and narrow, venomous eyes.

SOMETHING—some unwonted sound must have awakened him, for he sat abruptly upright in the darkness, ears strained to catch a repetition of the noise. A sense of apprehension lay on him, in his inner ear a tocsin sounded an alarm insistently. Listening in the smothering darkness, he was not certain if he'd heard a sound, or if it were the sudden stopping of a sound that wakened him.

Then through the blackness of the darkened house it came again. A scream, a woman's scream so brief that he could hardly trust the evidence of his ears. A cry of stark and utter terror uncontrolled that stopped almost as quickly as it started, but seemed to leave a tingling echo of shrill horror quivering in the air.

Helena! The cry—if it had been a cry—came from the direction of the front room where she slept.

He fumbled in the darkness for a weapon of some sort. His hands closed on the first thing that they touched, a heavy flask of toilet water, and swinging the stout bottle like a club he ran on tiptoe down the hall.

A little trickle of dim light flowed out into the darkened hall beneath her door—as if someone had spilled a splash of luminance upon her floor and some of it had filtered across the sill.

Breathlessly, he bent his head to listen, laid cautious fingers on the doorknob. Voices, muted to a ghostly murmur, came to him from the room beyond.

"—but that was more than a full thousand years ago, Harmichis—"

A short, dry laugh, as frigid as a breath from an ice-cave, broke through the girl's low pleading. "Know'st not, my Helena,

there be three things which time is powerless to soften, a sword, a diamond and the hatred of a servant of the Olden Gods?"

"Nay, not hatred, surely, good Harmichis. Once thou dids't say thou loved me—"

Again the short, sharp, terrifying laugh. "As thou hast said, that was a thousand years ago, O Helena. Think'st thou I put thee in the mystic sleep to save thee harmless from the Saracen invader only to have thee fall into the hands of this outlander? Thou lovest him, dost thou not?"

"Yes, that I do; better than my life or sight or blood or breath, with all my heart and soul and spirit, but—"

"Then make thee ready for the sleep that truly knows no waking, Helena. This time thou'lt have no second chance. No other man shall take thy hand and call thy name and bid thee rise to live and love, for thou'lt be dust. Bare thy white throat to the knife of my vengeance—"

Fullerton drove in the door with a tremendous kick. On the floor beside her bed knelt Helena, her hands upraised to implore mercy from the man who towered over her, winding one hand in her glowing hair and holding a short copper-bladed knife against her throat with the other.

HE recognized the intruder, the handsome, dark-skinned face, lean to emaciation, the lips drawn back in a reptilian smile of hatred about to be satiated—Philamon — Harmichis — the Egyptian priest whose love had driven him to hypnotize this girl so that she slept a thousand years, and who had followed her across those years to—

The Egyptian had hurled the girl down to the floor so violently that she lay in semi-consciousness, her hands stretched out before her like a diver's when he strikes the water, and turned on him. His teeth were very white against his swarthy skin, the hatred in his eyes was like a living thing. "Now, outlander!"

"You bet it's now!" Fullerton drew back the heavy bottle. "You're overdue in hell a thousand years—"

The bottle hurtled through the air with devastating force, missed the Egyptian as he dodged with weasel-like agility, smashed with a shattering crash against the wall, and—he was unarmed as the other advanced slowly, knife upraised.

Fullerton snatched up a slipper-chair and held it like a shield before him. Not a moment too soon, either, for the copper-bladed sacrificial knife, heavy with a grip of gold-encrusted lapis lazuli, came whining at him, struck the chair seat with a vicious *pung*, pierced it almost as if it had been cardboard, and thrust its needle point a full six inches through the fragile wood.

He hurled the chair at his advancing enemy, heard it crash with splintering legs against the wall as the other dropped to one knee, then felt his ankle seized as in a snare as the Egyptian slid across the floor and grasped him in a flying tackle.

They fell together in a thrashing heap, rolled over flailing, gouging, punching, digging at each other's eyes and clutching for each other's throats. Despite his slenderness the Egyptian was slightly heavier, and fought with the wild desperation of a mad man. But the years of heavy labor Fullerton had put in while he served his sentence stood him in good stead now. With a heave he drew the other to him, hugged him as a bear might hug its prey, and rolled until he felt the wiry body under him.

"Now, you damned desert rat—"

He felt a searing pain rake his right forearm, then his left, the coat of his pajamas ripped to tatters, and a line of bright blood marked the rents made in the fabric. From some hidden pocket in the linen smock he wore, Harmichis had jerked out a copper weapon like a set of brass

knuckles, but armed with curving razor-bladed claws instead of knobs on its rings.

Now his face was roweled by the tear-talons—he could taste the salty blood upon his tongue, for the blades had cut clear through his cheek—in a moment they would reach his throat, his jugular.

With an effort calling up his final ounce of strength he rose to his knees, tottered to his feet, dragged the other after him, hurled him off with all his force.

"Get up!" His voice was hoarse and croaking in his own ears, choked with blood and all but stifled with the pounding of his heart. "Get up, you truant from hell's fire, and fight like a man!"

He stumbled toward the Egyptian who lay sprawled on his back, his head bent forward at a seemingly impossible angle, a look of utter, shocked surprise upon his face.

"Get up!" he repeated, seizing the supine man's throat. "Get on your feet and fight, or I'll—"

Then he saw it. From the corner of the Egyptian's mouth a little stream of blood welled, slackening and growing with each failing labored palpitation of his heart.

The fellow lay with his back pressed against the bottom of the broken chair, and the knife—his knife—that had pierced through the flimsy wood had struck deep in his back and pierced his lung when he fell on it.

Fullerton began to laugh. A ghastly laugh that rose and trilled and mounted like a shriek of sheer hysteria. "Caught in his own trap—taken in his own net—killed with his own knife!" he almost screamed, and staggered, sagging to his knees with loss of blood and utter exhaustion.

THE sounds of the world were coming back again, but slowly, softly, as from a great distance. He could hear the casual noises of street traffic, the hooting of a taxi's horn, the rumble of a subway train as it slid into Clark Street station; far away the low, melodious belling of a Staten Island ferry's whistle.

Somebody bent above him. Somebody bathed his bleeding lacerated cheeks with sweet cool water, someone cried until her tears fell like a benediction on his upturned face. "O Full-ah-tohn, my lord, my life, my only love!" the syllables were thick with tears, but freighted with a very agony of adoration. "Arise, awake, my breath, my heart, my thrice-belovèd—"

"You're asking me to wake—as I did you, my dear?" he answered weakly.

"Oh, yes, belovèd, speak and tell me that you will not die—"

"Helena!"

She bent above him tenderly. Her hair was on his forehead, her breath was cool and sweet against his cheek.

"Yes, Full-ah-tohn?"

"Will you—when I get well—will you marry me? I'm almost old enough to be your father, but—you've given me something to live for—you've—"

"Hai!" Her delighted exclamation interrupted his whispered avowal. "Thou old enough to be my sire, O Full-ah-tohn? Dost thou not realize I am a full thousand years thy elder?"

He was too weak to rise, but with her arm beneath his neck, her hands behind his head to guide it, and her lips to find his, he could kiss her.

And in that kiss there was the lighting of another hearth-fire, the hanging of another crane.

Suggestions from an Old Friend

Ira B. Hensley writes from Houston, Texas:

"I had practically finished writing a caustic letter to you, criticizing many points in WEIRD TALES that seemed to need correction. About this time, I read the paragraph, 'A Hope and a Promise,' on page 124 of the September issue. This paragraph answered many questions that had been circulating in my mind, as well as suggesting possible answers to many others.

"As an old friend who has not missed a single issue of WEIRD TALES since its inception, may I make a suggestion to the other regular readers? Why should not we, who have had so many hours of enjoyment from WEIRD TALES, do something to increase its circulation and therefore its popularity? It is my suggestion that every loyal reader, who wishes to continue to enjoy high quality weird literature, "sell" a friend on the idea of purchasing a copy every month. If every loyal reader were to do this, circulation should increase by at least a third and possibly even more.

"I would like to make a couple of small criticisms of the magazine, if I may. First, can we not dispense with the stories of science-fiction? Weird stories, by their very nature, are not based on fact and cannot be explained in terms of the science of today or of the future. Inventions have progressed at such a rapid rate that the minds of men have been conditioned to accept, as possible, anything that may have a basis of science. Last, if my suggestion in the foregoing paragraph produces any results, can the magazine not have a cover more representative of the type of story within?"

A Strange Confession

From Binghamton, N. Y., Edwin L. Vargason writes:

"Listen to a strange confession. For years I have been using WEIRD TALES in my 'summer business.' Not covertly, mind you, but with acknowledgement and praise for my source. Half the boys in Binghampton can name six stories by Quinn without the slightest hesitation. The other half don't go to the same camp.

"It was just four years ago this summer that I began to run short of good ghost stories to tell around the campfire or before a blazing fireplace sheltered from the driving rain. It was then I began a long chain of the gripping tales from your magazine. I told between fifty and sixty stories every summer, and nary a 'dud.' The kids clamored for them; I bought every one I could lay my hands on, and my pay increased. Quinn, Bloch, Kuttner and Company became the gods of fiction to those boys. Theirs was a most willing 'suspension of disbelief.' They preferred to accept every word as Gospel truth.

"I've even had the audacity to mix in a few stories of my own! One of the most popular of them, was a personal experience. A mixture of fact and fiction seems a combination which highly imaginative young minds prefer.

"P. S. Oh, yes, the camp counsellors robbed me of half my WT library!"

Some Slaps and Pats

Charles Hidley writes from New York:

"In literary merit and story presentation WT is still supreme, but the format has so changed that mere story-telling abilities are far over-shadowed by the more disappointing aspects. Why isn't the Eyrie the same as two years ago? You ask if the story poll should be continued once more; it should never have been dropped. While the covers are getting much better than a year ago, the illustrations are far worse. Although the printed material on the cover is much less than a few issues back, I still maintain that only the

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30x5.00-20	2.55	1.25
6.25-17	2.90	1.35
29x4.75-19	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.25
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.85
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.30	1.10
32x6.50-18	3.35	1.40
33x6.50-19	3.35	1.42
6.00-17	3.40	1.45
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
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32x4	2.95	1.25
30x4½	2.95	1.25
32x4½	2.95	1.35
34x4½	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES
(High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x5	$4.23	$1.65
32x6	7.95	4.75
34x6	8.25	4.95
36x6	8.35	4.95
36x6	9.95	4.95

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
32x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x10	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
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7.50-20	4.45	1.95
6.00-20	5.85	2.25

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$2.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.25
9.75-20	12.95	6.45

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story and author of the cover tale should be announced in a narrow strip at the bottom. Of course bi-monthly publication and fewer pages are most regrettable, but I consider it unfair to blame that on the publishers; although I feel that WT is the best and only item in its field, and having no serious competitors it should be able to meet a monthly publication. I know all my friends read it. A last complaint is this: devote less time to clubs. Keep the Club, Black Arts items and It Happened to Me in one group, and the old Eyrie with comments only on the mag and its progress and development in another.

"It was quite difficult to rate the November stories because most were quite enjoyable; making a compromise by joining some together was the only answer. In first place are Bloch's *Wine of the Sabbat* and Derleth's *Sandwin Compact*, the former having a No. 3 pic and the latter a No. 2 pic. Bloch's sounded too realistic to be entertaining and I don't doubt that the author's home 'howls' at night. The very modern setting and sophisticated characters were exciting and the blasé style much in use these days. AWD is thanked for continuing Lovecraft's 'manuscript.'

"In second showing are *The Last Waltz*—how happily surprised I was to find not a mushy and cliché ending—and a great humor yarn, *Turn Over*. You print too many shorts. *The Mound* is third with the best pic. Ferman is returning to his fine work of yore. I'd like to see Sudbury, Hugh Rankin and De Lay some more.

From Chicago, Illinois, C. L. Leighton writes:

"I believe this is my third letter to you, over a 10-year period of unbroken reading of your magazine—the first was in praise of *The Solitary Hunters*. This time, my hearty compliments to Mr. Nelson S. Bond for his most unusual *'Unusual Romance of Ferdinand Pratt.'* The title alone starts a smile— his clever style and snappy expressions adorned a very exceptioned short for your publication. Can't we have more of these facetious, brilliant ones, to offset occasionally the Schopenhauer accent?

"Long life to WEIRD TALES."

Enjoyed Every Page

From Newport, R. I., Raymond E. Ripa writes:

"You asked your readers to let you know how they felt about Mr. Allgeier's suggestion, in the Eyrie for November, to restore the old custom of allowing the readers to vote for the best story in each issue. I am greatly in favor of this, but

why not go further? Print not only the name of the winning story, but at least the first three.

"With the above out of the way, please accept my congratulations on the November issue of WEIRD TALES. When Mr. Wright left as editor, and WT went bi-monthly, I was afraid the mag was starting on the downward path. But this issue has dissolved my fears. From the Brundage cover—she is your best cover artist, by the way; many thanks for getting her back—to the last page, I enjoyed every page. The stories were so uniformly good, they are hard to rate, but anyway, here goes: 1. *The Sandwin Compact;* 2. *The Mound,* 3 *The Mirror,* with *The Last Waltz* a close fourth. Derleth handles the Cthulhu theme almost as well as the late master of them all, Lovecraft, and perhaps it is nostalgic memories that caused me to put his story at the top of the list.

One of the Real Fiction Fans is Heard

Lane Ferris writes from Cleveland, Ohio:

"I am one of your newer readers—at least I think so, judging from letters from some of the old timers. Well, I'd like to say this—I like WEIRD TALES, but what I like most about it is the fiction in it, not the letters or criticisms or knocks or boosts. When I put down my fifteen cents it is because I want some stories to read—and that's why I spend the money. Because I like the type of stories you print is why I buy the type of magazine WEIRD TALES is. And by the way, I am one of those readers who class science fiction stories as weird—they are weird in conception, I think, and therefore most certainly belong in a magazine such as WEIRD TALES—and this in spite of those gents who take pen in hand to say they don't. I can't see what can be more weird than the imaginings of those writers who think up phenomenon of the past and future of the science fiction world—and anyway, I like 'em.

Minute dissection of details, authors, plots, illustrations, cover ideas and execution, may interest some of your readers with a lot of time on their hands, but when a man sits down to enjoy a magazine or a book it's the story that counts in the long run. If I wanted to pan anything I'd go for the editor—he is responsible for what is between the covers of the magazine isn't he? So as far as WEIRD TALES goes, I'd say give us good stories and don't take up much space with correspondence and votes about them—when we read a story we know whether we like it or not. If we do we buy your magazine.

By the way, what happened to the Frank Gruber story you announced and didn't run? I notice his name among best sellers in the mystery field, and enjoyed his "The Golden Chalice" in your July number."

Sorry we had to leave out the Gruber story "The Book of the Dead." He has promised it to us for an early issue, however.

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A Correspondence Institution

Sharks in the Rocky Mountains!

Some amazing events are recounted in *Dragon Moon* (this issue) but after all, you can find sharks in the Rocky Mountains—oysters in the Alleghenies—fish in the Alps! Not live ones, of course, but fossils. Sometime in earth's pre-history the continents of today were, for the most part, under water—and other continents, sunk now in the salt limbos of the ocean, basked in the sunshine. Throughout eternity, land and water have battled for supremacy.

Rearing up from tiny islands in the South Seas are monster statues, built of materials non-existent there today, and of a size impossible even to twentieth century transportation. These islands are mountain ranges that have managed, so to speak, to keep their heads above water. On the East coast of Africa mountains snap off at the beach—only to reappear in Australia. Besides the testimony of the mountains, mountains of evidence force our reason to reconstruct Atlantis, Pacific Mu, and the Lemuria of the Indian and Sunda Seas—and to assume that these "fabulous" continents not only existed, but that they were inhabited.

Holding a reasonable quota of water is the theory that the ancient civilizations of Africa on the one side, and the Toltecs, Incas and Aztecs of South America on the other, were the outer fringes or colonies of a great culture having its center in the continent of Atlantis. But no one really knows. What one imagines is just as likely to be right as anything else. So let us imagine.

Let us imagine that fabled capital of a fabulous continent—The City Of The Golden Gates.

Set on the slopes of a hill in beautifully wooded country, about fifteen miles from the sea on the East coast, and connected with the ocean by an elaborate system of canals, the city itself was divided into three great belts, and in the days of its greatness embraced within the vast circle of moats over two million inhabitants. On the summit of the hill lay the palace of the emperor—a residence of unbelievable luxury and magnificance. Welling up inside the palace was an everlasting spring that flowed down through fountains and waterfalls in the palace grounds, and supplied the population by means of the greatest water system in all history.

The Atlanteans are reputed, according to one colorful set of theories, to have possessed aircraft, printing, alcohol, explosives and poison gas—not to mention hospitals, hotels, schools and heating plants. The priests and ruling classes are credited with having had occult powers so advanced that they could bring down rain, move mountains, and accomplish other marvels.

No one knows when the inhabitants of Atlantis existed, or what they looked like. There are whole libraries of theories—all different, and one as likely to be right or wrong as another. Doubtful as they are, these theories are wonderfully fascinating. They feature an array of semi-reptile men, with eyes at the back of their head—beast men covered with fur and horn, and having the heads of dogs, snakes and bulls—giants, sixteen feet high, winged birdmen and double-headed beings; you can take your choice. Actually these beast men are not absolutely impossible biologically, for even today strange freaks are born—and our fingernails may be the final relic of the ages when man was covered with horn! One theory has it that Atlantis was destroyed in a sudden cataclysm of fire and water—another states that it was more a question of gradual erosion. Some put her date at a million years B.C.—others at ten thousand.

Two things only border on the certain. The fabulous continents existed. And they were inhabited. All else is hidden behind time's impenetrable smoke screen.

Perhaps in 300,000 A.D., men will be scratching their heads over the mystery of the sunken city of New York!

WEIRD TALES CLUB

• This is your club—a medium to help you and other fantasy and science-fiction fans get together. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

Write to Martin Ware, Secretary, Weird Tales Club, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York

Fantasy Enthusiast from Down Under

I FELT I simply must write, and congratulate you on the fact that you have finally projected this WEIRD TALES CLUB into being. For many long years now, I have wished to become a member of a club after this sort. And, lately, since you published the introductory notice of this club, there has been a decided uplifting in the quality of the letters published, with a subtle murmering of Werewolves, Vampires, Ghouls, and not a few of Black Arts, Doctrines, etc. As for myself, I am interested in any of these fascinating studies, and have been a constant pest to all the second-hand book dealers in Auckland, hoping to stumble across a copy of some "Necronomicon" in the realms of these shops, which, if the truth be admitted, are not the cleanest desirable. But, so far, I have had no more luck, than to get some very ancient books on Eastern carpets, and lots and lots of volumes of Legends.

Of course, living in a country as packed with ancient legends, as is New Zealand, I have read most of the ancient beliefs of our native Maori. Their preceding race, of strange mystery, that is the Morioris, are not mentioned in the most ancient of history books, and the very first of their Folk Tales. Some mighty strange and unpredictable things happened here, during the Chaotic years of the Maori Wars, and who knows what the secrets of the Tohungas, or witch-doctors, dealt with, and what they discovered, of the mysteries of life?

I have discovered that they, too, had legends of "The Lake of Life" and hideous monsters, "Long-legedy Beasties" that crawled in the night.

As I mean you to please accept this letter as an application for membership, I suppose I should be able to open a regular correspondence with other members, even if they only want the New Zealand stamps?

G. B. Dryland.

9 Lincoln St., Ponsonby,
Auckland, New Zealand.

We hope you get bags of letters, G. B. Dryland—and not only from stamp collectors!

Get-Together for Fans Around Detroit

Please put my name on the Club roster as a member of the WT Club.

We, too, have a Science Fiction and Fantasy Club, and I would like to extend an invitation to all fans around Detroit who read WT to join our organization. Those who are interested should communicate with me.

Richard J. Kuhn,
Sec. Detroit Science Fictioneers.
13598 Cheyenne, Detroit, Michigan.

All the Way from Scotland

Would you please enroll me as a member of the WEIRD TALES CLUB. I am well-known here as a fantasy fan, an editor of a weird fan magazine called "Macabre," and a news-letter called "Dawn Shadows."

Those who see "Polaris" may remember "The Truant" which I wrote under the name of "Hilary St. Claire."

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I think the Club is an excellent idea—I've wanted something of the sort for a long time.

James Parkhill Rathbourne,
Fantasy Litterateur.
c/o Mrs. Parkhill, 24 Heriot Place,
Edinburgh 3, Scotland.

Paging Members in Northern California

I am writing for myself and my friend, James Bush. We wish to join your rising organization, the WEIRD TALES CLUB.

We are getting an organization started in this area and wish to have all in the vicinity of Northern California to communicate with us.

Suggestions will be appreciated as well as any offers of a regular meeting place for future meetings.

Sincerely yours,
J. J. Fortier, Treas. S*P.,
Mr. James Bush.
1978 36 Avenue, Oakland, Cal.

Wanted: Fans in Pen Argyl

I'm getting some responses to my letter in WT but from far away! DON'T PEOPLE AROUND HERE READ WEIRD TALES AND SCIENCE FICTION?

John Warso, Jr.
119 Jackson Ave., Pen Argyl, Pa.

Wants to Form Correspondence Unit

I have watched the progress of the newly organized WTC with interest. I now wish to join. Any readers who are interested in forming a correspondence unit of the Club to discuss fantasy and science fiction, write me and let's get together. I promise to answer all letters. I hope this is published, as I have no one to discuss my interests in reading with.

Bill Peebles.
Box 313, Cleveland, Texas.

Wake Up—Mr. Hopkins!

Kindly enroll me in your Club, and it may remind Julius Hopkins he has owed me a letter for three years if he sees my name. I think we could have a Weird Tales Club in Penna., because I believe one of our best authors, Edmond Hamilton, lives here, I think in New Castle.

You might like to know how members came to read WEIRD TALES. I was at my sister's home and had nothing to read; so I gave her some money to get me a magazine. She came back with WEIRD TALES and said to me, "Anne, this looked good to me," and it has looked good to me ever since.

Anne Miller.
1217 Eckert Road, Monaca, Pa.

NEW MEMBERS

J. J. Fortier, 1836 39th Ave., Oakland, Calif.
Wayne L. Boyd, 630 East 13th St., Eugene, Oregon.
Lewis Sepesy, Route 1, Box 125, Plant City, Florida.
G. B. Dryland, 9 Lincoln St., Ponsonby, Auckland, New Zealand.
Miss Myrtle Gaige, 304 South Ave., Elmira Heights, N. Y. (age 26.)
Hannes Bok, 527 West 121st St., New York, N. Y.
Frank F. Wissisky, 336 East 167th St., New York, N. Y.
Richard J. Kuhn, 13598 Cheyenne, Detroit, Michigan.
Miss Anne Miller, 1217 Eckert Road, Monaca, Pa.
Don Hunter, 17382 Kentucky Ave., Detroit, Michigan.
Tom O'Neill, 1726 West 12th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Kay De Lasaux, 1043 Nineteenth St., Rock Island, Ill.
Miss Betty M. Horning, 7112 Fortieth Ave., Kenosha, Wis.
Miss Mary Worden, 4408 Cambridge, Kansas City, Kansas.
Jerome A. Padrutt, 45 East Birch St., Chippewa Falls, Wis.
Charles H. L. Blondel, 15 Duke St., Providence, R. I. (age 26).
F. J. Torbett, P. O. Box 265, Marlin, Texas.
Nora J. Richard, Route 2, Sayre, Penn.
James Parkhill Rathbone, care Mrs. Parkhill, 24 Heriot Place, Edinburgh 3, Scotland.
Bill Peebles, Box 313, Cleveland, Texas.
Robert Smith, 318 Roycroft Ave., Long Beach, Calif.
Glenn Price, Lakeview Apartments, Mahopac, N. Y.
Edwin L. Vergason, 10 Beman St., Binghamton, N. Y.
Randall Hockett, Gold Beach, Oregon. (age 21.)
John Wasso, Jr., Pen Argyl, Pa.
Ernest E. Vonkleeck, P. O. Box 6, Fort Devens, Mass. (age 27.)
John Walsh, 221 Avenue A, New York, N. Y.
Miss E. Lobel, 923 St. Nicholas Ave., New York, N. Y.

(*Continued on next page*)

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ADDRESS.....

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(*New Members—continued*)

Rudolph Luoma, 305 East John St., Newberry, Michigan. (age 17.)

Ed. Abelson, Room 439, Hotel Commonwealth, 2757 Pine Grove, Chicago, Ill.

Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Iowa.

M. Smith, 106 Dak. St. N., Aberdeen, South Dakota.

E. Lyons, Jr., 46 Seymour St. Auburn, N. Y.

Bart Reagan, Air Base Squadron, Security Section, Langley Field, Va.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1940, State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared T. Raymond Foley, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President of the WEIRD TALES, publishers of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher:* WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Editor:* D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Managing Editor:* None; *Business Managers:* T. Raymond Foley and W. J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock are: T. Raymond Foley, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; W. J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(*Signed*) T. Raymond Foley, *President.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of September, 1940.

H. J. Hagger.

[SEAL]

(*Signed*) H. J. Hagger, Notary Public, Westchester Co. New York Clerk's No. 731; New York Register's No. 1H459.

My commission expires March 30, 1941.

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REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green—trimmed in black and silver—made of sturdy fibre board—now available for only one dollar ($1.00) to purchasers of a Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble. It will hold six hundred (600) pounds. This combination gives you a miniature office at home. **Mail the coupon today.**

THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU

LEARN TYPING FREE

To help you even further, you get Free with this special offer a 24-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent Free while this offer holds.

SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a beautiful carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood bound with a special Dupont Fabric.

SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Deluxe Portable—standard 4-row keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key; two color ribbon and automatic reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 8.2" wide, black key cards and white letters, rubber cushioned feet.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

The Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable Typewriter is sold on a trial basis with a money-back guarantee. If, after ten days trail, you are not entirely satisfied, we will take it back, paying all shipping charges and refunding your good will deposit at once. You take no risk.

SEND COUPON NOW!

Remington Rand Inc. Dept 147-12
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable, including Carrying Case and Free Typing Booklet, for as little as 10c a day. Send Catalogue.

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ELGIN TOWER, Suite U-63-A
ELGIN, ILLINOIS

Please mail me at once complete information and how to get the "Century" Policy for Free Inspection without obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....